

UKRAINE CONFLICT UPDATES

Jun 15, 2022 - [Press ISW](#)



This page collects ISW and CTP's updates on the conflict in Ukraine. In late February 2022, ISW began publishing daily synthetic products covering key events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. These Ukraine Conflict Updates replaced ISW's previous "[Indicators and Thresholds for Russian Military Operations in Ukraine and/or Belarus](#)," which we maintained from November 12, 2021, through February 17, 2022.

This list also includes prominent warning alerts that ISW and CTP launched beyond our daily Ukraine Conflict Updates. These products addressed critical inflection points as they occurred.

[Click here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map complements the static control-of-terrain maps that ISW daily produces with high-fidelity and, where possible, street-level assessments of the war in Ukraine.

[Click here](#) to read about the methodology behind ISW and CTP's mapping of this conflict.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 1

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Layne Philipson, Katherine Lawlor, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 1, 7pm ET

[Click here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces are reportedly continuing to transfer troops from northern Donetsk Oblast to support defensive positions in southern Ukraine and may be halting the Slovyansk campaign for the time being. The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence (GUR) Representative Vadym Skibitsky stated that Russian forces withdrew airborne tactical groups from Donetsk Oblast and redeployed the units to occupied Kherson Oblast territories two weeks ago.[1] Skibitsky added that Russian forces are also redeploying elements of the Eastern Military District (EMD) operating in Slovyansk to southern Ukraine and are transferring a large number of troops to Crimea to prepare to defend occupied Kherson and/or Zaporizhia Oblasts against Ukrainian counteroffensives. The UK Defense Ministry also noted that Russian forces likely identified Zaporizhia Oblast as a vulnerable front in need of reinforcement, and the Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces are regrouping in Zaporizhia Oblast.[2] Social media

footage has showed Russian forces moving equipment and personnel to both Zaporizhia and Kherson Oblasts in recent weeks.[3]

The Russian withdrawal of some troops from northern Donetsk Oblast will deprive the Slovyansk effort of necessary combat power, in the same way that Russian forces neglected the Zaporizhia and Kherson Oblasts fronts during offensive operations in Luhansk Oblast. The withdrawal will likely create an opportunity for Ukrainian forces to launch a counteroffensive on the Izyum axis, just as Russian capture of Luhansk Oblast allowed Ukraine to set conditions for a counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast. The Russian redeployment of troops to Zaporizhia Oblast also suggests that Ukrainian counteroffensives are not confined to Kherson Oblast and will likely take place throughout the southern axis.

ISW assesses that Russian forces were responsible for the killing of 53 Ukrainian POWs in an explosion at a Russian-controlled prison in Olenivka, Donetsk Oblast on July 28. Two US officials anonymously confirmed to *Politico* on August 1 that no traces of US-provided High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), Ukraine's most precise artillery system, were found at the prison site.[4] The Kremlin alleges that Ukraine fired HIMARS and precision-guided rockets to kill Ukrainian POWs and deter Ukrainian defectors. Satellite and other imagery from the site indicate that the attack only damaged one building, did not collapse the walls of that building, and did not leave any shell craters in the vicinity, very strongly suggesting that the destruction of the prison was the result of either a precision strike or an internally planted incendiary or explosive.[5] One US official told *Politico* that "the evidence showed the attack was not conducted by Kyiv." If Ukraine had used something other than HIMARS to conduct the strike, the attack would almost certainly have left collateral damage around the facility, including craters and other damaged buildings. Given the US assessment that HIMARS were not used in the attack, ISW assesses that Russia was responsible for this attack on Ukrainian POWs in violation of the Geneva Conventions.

Key Takeaways

- **ISW assesses that Russian forces were responsible for the July 28 attack on the Olenivka prison that killed 53 Ukrainian POWs; two anonymous US officials confirmed that there is no evidence that Ukrainian forces used US-provided HIMARS, some of the only munitions Ukraine has that are precise enough to do the kind of limited damage seen in satellite and other imagery, to strike the prison.**
- **Russian forces are transferring elements of the Eastern Military District (EMD) from the Slovyansk area to support defensive positions along the Southern Axis.**
- **Russian forces did not conduct any offensive operations north of Slovyansk or around Siversk.**
- **Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground assaults on settlements south and southeast of Bakhmut.**
- **Russian proxy authorities did not claim any territorial gains near Avdiivka as Russian forces launched unsuccessful ground assaults on Avdiivka and Pisky.**
- **Russian regional officials are reportedly failing to provide promised payments to the "Atal" Volunteer Battalion of the Republic of Chuvashia.**
- **The Kremlin is likely prioritizing propaganda and sham referenda over the welfare of Ukrainian civilians in occupied Ukrainian territories.**
- **Russian occupation forces are likely increasing efforts to deter and suppress partisan movements in occupied territories as partisan attacks on Russian officials and Ukrainian collaborators continue.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of August 1, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 31

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Layne Philipson, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

Russian forces have resumed localized ground attacks northwest and southwest of Izyum and may be setting conditions for offensive operations further west into Kharkiv Oblast or toward Kharkiv City. Russian forces have already launched unsuccessful assaults and reconnaissance-in-force attempts on Chepil, Shchurivka, and Husarivka (northwest of Izyum) and resumed assaults on Dmytrivka

and Brazhikivka (southwest of Izyum) in recent days.[1] Russian forces maintained positions around Balaklia and Velyka Komyshuvakha for months and may use these two areas as springboards for an offensive operation. Russian forces may use their positions around Balaklia to restart assaults on Kharkiv City from the southeast. Russian forces are extremely unlikely to seize Kharkiv Oblast or capture Kharkiv City – the second most populated city in Ukraine – given the pace of Russian progress in Donbas and continued challenges in force generation and logistics. ISW has previously assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin may have ordered Russian forces to take Kharkiv City and the unoccupied portion of Kharkiv Oblast but that he is unlikely to be successful in such goals. Russian forces may also be conducting spoiling attacks to prevent Ukrainian counteroffensives.

Crimean occupation officials obliquely accused Ukraine of orchestrating a drone attack on the Russian Black Sea Fleet headquarters in occupied Sevastopol on July 31, but Ukrainian officials denied responsibility for the attack.[2] Russian Governor of Sevastopol Mihail Razvozhaev claimed that Ukrainians “decided to spoil” Russia’s Navy Day celebrations and noted that a drone exploded in the headquarters’ yard but did not specify whether Ukrainian forces or locals launched the drone.[3] Razvozhaev published images showcasing minor damage to the headquarters building and yard, and social media footage depicted a small cloud of smoke rising from the building.[4] Razvozhaev also claimed that the explosion wounded six people. Russian Crimean Senator Olga Kovitidi later announced that unspecified actors carried out the attack with a makeshift drone from within the territory of Sevastopol.[5] The Ukrainian Naval Forces and Odesa Oblast Military Administration Spokesman Serhiy Bratchuk indirectly suggested that the drone attack was a Russian false flag operation.[6] ISW cannot independently verify the actor responsible for the attack.

The Russian government may be complicating international efforts to discern the nature of an unidentified July 28 kinetic event on the Olenivka penal colony. The Russian Ministry of Defense officially invited experts from the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to investigate the attack at the Olenivka prison on July 30.[7] The ICRC stated that it has not received access to the prison as of July 31, however.[8] Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereschuk also noted that Russian authorities have not responded to Ukrainian requests to return the bodies of deceased Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs).[9]

Open-source intelligence (OSINT) analyst Oliver Alexander published an examination of satellite imagery from July 27 showing open graves at the Olenivka prison, noting that July 29 satellite imagery appears to show that the same graves have been covered.[10] Investigative journalism group Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins stated that lower resolution satellite imagery indicates ground disturbances after July 18 and prior to July 21, suggesting that the Russians may have planned the incident in advance.[11] ISW will continue to monitor the open source for information on the strike on Olenivka and will provide updates as they appear.

Key Takeaways

- **The Kremlin has not responded to the International Red Cross (ICRC) request to access the Olenivka prison as of July 31, hindering the international investigation efforts.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks southwest and northwest of Izyum, consistent with ISW’s assessment that Russian forces may be setting conditions for advances northwest of the current Izyum-Sloviansk line.**
- **Russian forces continued ground attacks northwest of Sloviansk, northeast of Siversk, and to the east and south of Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces made marginal gains in the Avdiivka area and continued ground attacks towards Avdiivka and Pisky.**
- **Russian authorities began recruiting volunteers for the Nevsky and Ladoga Battalions in Leningrad Oblast, Russia.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continued to prepare for a referendum in Kherson Oblast and took measures to depict support for Russian control of the occupied territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 31, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 30

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko and Frederick W. Kagan

July 30, 9:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces are likely prioritizing offensive operations toward Bakhmut and around Donetsk City at the expense of efforts to take Siversk and Slovyansk. Russian commanders are likely seeking to exploit recent gains in the Novoluhanske area to pressure Bakhmut from the east. Their efforts around Donetsk City likely aim to push Ukrainian forces out of artillery range of the city. They may also be intended to gain as much ground in Donetsk Oblast as possible before planned referenda in September. Russian offensive operations are very unlikely to take Bakhmut, which is large and well-defended, or to make dramatic gains west of Donetsk City even if they manage to take the towns of Avdiivka and Pisky that have held out against their pressure since the original Russian invasion in 2014. Fighting in these areas will likely intensify, however, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is calling on residents to evacuate.[1]

Neither Russia nor Ukraine produced new evidence regarding the cause or responsibility for the deaths of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) at the Olenivka prison in occupied Donetsk Oblast.

Russian officials raised the death toll of the event to 50 and released a list of deceased POWs.[2] Ukrainian officials stated that they are unable to verify the list at this time and called for an international investigation.[3] Maxar has provided post-strike imagery of the damage. ISW is unable to confirm the nature or cause of the incident, although it remains more likely that Russian forces were responsible.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces conducted ground assaults around Bakhmut and the environs of Donetsk City as well as southwest of Izyum. One assault east of Bakhmut made limited gains.**
- **Russian forces did not conduct ground assaults near Siversk again, suggesting that they are deprioritizing operations in that area.**
- **Satellite imagery showed Russian reinforcements concentrated near the Ukrainian border on the ground line of communication (GLOC) leading toward Izyum.**
- **Ukrainian forces disrupted a Russian ground assault in Kherson Oblast with preemptive artillery strikes.**
- **Ukrainian officials claim that damage to the railway bridge across the Dnipro near Kherson renders Russian forces unable to resupply their positions on the west bank of the river by rail.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 30, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 29

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Layne Phillipson, Katherine Lawlor, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 29, 8:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

A kinetic event killed and wounded scores of Ukrainian POWs in Russian-occupied Olenivka, Donetsk Oblast, on July 28.[1] Ukraine and Russia are blaming each other for the attack and available visual evidence appears to support the Ukrainian claim more than the Russian, but ISW cannot independently assess the nature of the attack or the party responsible for it at this time.

The Russian Defense Ministry asserted that Ukrainian forces deliberately struck the Olenivka pre-trial detention center holding Ukrainian POWs including Azov Regiment servicemen using Western-provided HIMARS, killing at least 40 and wounding 75 POWs.[2] Kremlin-sponsored news outlet "RIA Novosti" published videos of the detention center, which showed fire damage but not the sort of damage that a HIMARS strike would likely have caused.[3] RIA Novosti also released footage of HIMARS missile fragments but provided no evidence that the fragments were recovered at Olenivka.[4] Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Ambassador to Russia Leonid Miroshnik claimed that Ukrainian forces struck the pre-detention center to eliminate the evidence of Ukrainian surrenders and prevent POWs from speaking out against the Ukrainian government.[5]

The Ukrainian General Staff said that Russian forces conducted the attack as a false flag operation to cover up Russian war crimes, disrupt the supply of Western weapons, discredit Ukrainian forces, and stoke social tensions within Ukrainian society.[6] The Ukrainian General Staff stated that a deliberate explosion occurred near the newly-constructed penal colony, to which Russian forces had transferred Ukrainian POWs a few days earlier. The Ukrainian General Staff also noted that Ukrainian analysis of the damage to the building, intercepted phone conversations between Russian servicemen, the lack of reported shelling in Olenivka, and the absence of casualties among Russian personnel serving at the penal colony all point to a Russian deliberate "terrorist act" as the cause of the incident.[7] The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) accused Wagner Group head Yevgeny Prigozhin of ordering the "terrorist act" without consulting with the Russian Defense Ministry, to conceal the embezzlement of funds allocated for the maintenance of Ukrainian POWs before an official inspection on September 1.[8] The Ukrainian Office of the General Prosecutor reported that the explosion killed at least 40 and wounded 130 Ukrainian POWs.[9]

ISW is unable to assess the nature of the event or the party responsible for it with any confidence at this time. We will update our assessment as more information becomes available.

Key Takeaways

- **A kinetic event killed and wounded scores of Ukrainian POWs in Russian-occupied Donetsk Oblast on July 28. Ukraine and Russia are blaming each other for the attack. Available visual evidence appears to support the Ukrainian claim more than the Russian, but ISW cannot independently assess the nature of the attack or the party responsible for it at this time.**
- **Ground fighting continued north of Kharkiv City with no significant change in control of terrain.**
- **Russian forces attempted a limited ground assault in Kherson Oblast and continued conducting combat operations without creating strike groups along occupied lines.**
- **Russian regional outlets reported the recruitment and establishment of an additional volunteer battalion in the Republic of Buryatia and the formation of a reserve battalion in Novosibirsk.**
- **Members of Russian President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party traveled to occupied Ukrainian territories to promote an organization called "We Are Together with Russia," likely to present the façade of a "grassroots" call for the Russian annexation of occupied Ukraine and to prepare for falsified annexation referenda.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 28
[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Layne Phillipson, Katherine Lawlor, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 28, 7:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

The Russian grouping in Donetsk Oblast is likely seeking to capitalize on recent marginal gains southeast of Bakhmut by continuing to attempt to advance in that area. Russian forces may be de-emphasizing attempts to take Siversk in order to concentrate on Bakhmut, but it is too soon to tell. Russian forces continued efforts to advance northward on Bakhmut from recently gained positions around Novoluhanske and the Vuhlehirska Power Plant while pursuing southwestward advances along the T1302 highway from recently captured positions in Berestove. By contrast, Russian forces have been struggling to make concrete gains around Siversk and have not made any confirmed advances toward the city since the capture of the Luhansk Oblast Administrative border in early July. Russian command is likely, therefore, seeking to maintain momentum around Bakhmut, potentially at the expense of continued pressure on Siversk. Russian forces remain unlikely to take Bakhmut itself, despite recent incremental advances in its direction.

Putin replaced Colonel-General Gennady Zhidko as deputy defense minister and head of the Main Military-Political Directorate on July 28.[1] Putin signed a decree appointing Colonel-General Viktor Goremykin to Zhidko's position and has not publicly announced the appointment of Zhidko to a new position.[2] ISW previously reported that Zhidko would become the overall commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, a report that appears to have been incorrect.[3]

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces in Donetsk Oblast likely seek to capitalize on recent marginal territorial gains around Bakhmut and may deprioritize efforts to take Siversk.
- Russian forces conducted limited ground assaults northwest of Slovyansk and northeast and southwest of Bakhmut.
- Russian forces may be intensifying offensive operations around Avdiivka to reduce Ukrainian strikes in and around Donetsk City.
- Russian forces may be setting conditions for renewed offensive operations toward Kharkiv City.
- Russian forces attempted a limited ground offensive on the Southern Axis but are likely facing territorial losses in Kherson Oblast.
- Russian forces are attempting to preserve their ground lines of communication over the Dnipro River connecting Kherson City to rear areas in eastern Kherson Oblast.
- The Kremlin continued measures to compensate for officer and manpower losses in Ukraine.
- The Kremlin is continuing to institutionalize its occupation administrations in occupied parts of Ukraine to prepare for sham referenda, annexation, and integration into Russia.
- Russian occupation forces are continuing to pressure Ukrainian civilians in occupied areas to use Russian rubles and passports and to attend Russian-run schools, setting conditions for longer-term social control in occupied territories.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 27

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, Katherine Lawlor, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 27, 7:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces appear able to sustain only two significant offensive operations in Ukraine at this time, one attempting to seize Siversk and the other advancing on Bakhmut. These operations have focused on advances in the Siversk, Donetsk Oblast, direction from Verkhokamianka and Bilohorivka

and in the Bakhmut direction from the areas of Novoluhanske and the Vuhlehirska Thermal Power Plant since the end of the operational pause on July 16.^[1] Russian forces have committed enough resources to conduct near-daily ground assaults and to seize territory on these two axes but have been unable to sustain a similar offensive operational tempo or to make similar territorial gains elsewhere in Ukraine. The Russian offensive, therefore, remains likely to culminate before seizing any other major urban areas in Ukraine.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces currently appear able to sustain only two significant offensive operations in Ukraine, both in Donetsk Oblast, and the Russian offensive remains likely to culminate before seizing additional significant population centers.**
- **Ukrainian forces may have launched a localized counterattack southwest of Izyum.**
- **Russian forces attacked settlements east of Siversk and northeast and southeast of Bakhmut.**
- **Ground fighting is ongoing north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Ukrainian forces struck the Antonivskyi Bridge for the third time in ten days on July 27, likely rendering it unusable.**
- **The Mari El Republic north of Kazan sent two volunteer battalions to train and is forming a third battalion to deploy to Ukraine.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are importing Russians to work in occupied territories due to a lack of Ukrainian collaborators.**
- **Mariupol occupation authorities continue withholding humanitarian aid to force civilians to cooperate with and work for the occupation administration.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 27, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 26

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Katherine Lawlor, Layne Philipson, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 26, 7:15 pm ET

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Russian-backed proxy leadership continues to enunciate deadlines for the capture of additional Ukrainian territory, likely to support ongoing preparations for referenda on the annexation of these territories to the Russian Federation. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Deputy Minister of

Information Daniil Bezsonov stated on July 25 that the DNR expects to capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast by the end of August.[1] Various Russian and Western sources have previously reported that Russia intends to hold referenda in occupied areas by the first half of September, likely sometime around September 11, which is the unified voting day in the Russian Federation.[2] Proxy leadership and Russian-backed occupation authorities are likely pushing for deadlines for military objectives to support condition setting for expedited annexation objectives, although Russian forces remain unlikely to occupy significant additional territory in Ukraine before the early autumn annexation timeline.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian proxy and occupation leadership is enunciating expedited deadlines for the capture of Ukrainian territory to align with the Kremlin's efforts to prepare for the annexation of occupied territories into the Russian Federation.**
- **Russian forces gained marginal ground northeast of Bakhmut and are continuing to fight east and south of Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces conducted a limited attack northwest of Izyum, likely to secure Russian rear areas on the Izyum-Sloviansk line.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited attacks southwest of Donetsk City near the Zaporizhia Oblast border.**
- **Russian forces focused on defending occupied lines and conducted a limited ground assault in northwestern Kherson Oblast.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian logistics nodes in Kherson Oblast.**
- **The Kremlin is continuing to constitute regional volunteer battalions for deployment into Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian intelligence leaks continue to reveal the Kremlin's annexation agendas for occupied Ukraine by way of falsified referenda.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 25

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Katherine Lawlor, Layne Philipson, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 25, 8:00pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces made marginal territorial gains south of Bakhmut on July 25 but are largely suffering from the same fundamental limitations that previously prevented them from rapidly gaining substantial ground during offensive operations in Luhansk Oblast. Geolocated social media

footage from July 25 shows that troops of the Wagner Group Private Military Company (PMC) have advanced into Novoluhanske and Russian and Ukrainian sources noted that Russian forces are taking control of the territory of the Vuhledar Power Plant on the northern edge of Novoluhanske, likely as a result of a controlled Ukrainian withdrawal from the area.[1]

Russian Telegram channels began reporting on Russian attempts to advance on Novoluhanske as early as May 25, which means that Russian troops have been unsuccessfully attacking this single location for two months.[2] Novoluhanske is neither a large settlement nor is it characterized by particularly challenging terrain, yet Russian forces have impaled themselves on it for weeks.

The capture of Novoluhanske and the Vuhledar Power Plant will not generate an advantageous salient along which Russian troops will be able to advance northwards towards Bakhmut. The Russian campaign to seize the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area benefitted from the fact that they had already created a salient with those two cities near its apex. They were able continually to press on the flanks of Ukrainian defensive positions until they had secured Severodonetsk. They struggled after that to take advantage of the fact that Lysychansk remained at the apex of a salient until they managed to break out from Popasna to the south and drive northward. Siversk is currently the town closest to the apex of the remaining salient, and Russian forces have struggled to advance against it. The Russian seizure of Novoluhanske and the Vuhledar Power Plant, on the other hand, flattens the Ukrainian defensive line rather than perpetuating a salient, thereby limiting the advantage the occupation of those areas gives to the Russian forces.

The operations around Novoluhanske indicate that Russian forces are suffering the same limitations in terms of their ability to effectively use battlefield geometry (such as the creation of effective salients) to their advantage, which is exacerbated by the extreme difficulty Russian forces regularly have capturing small and relatively insignificant bits of terrain over weeks or months of fighting. These limitations will grow as Russian units continually degrade themselves during assaults on small villages. Russian forces are unlikely to be able to effectively leverage the capture of Novoluhanske to take Bakhmut, and the continual tactical and operational limitations they are facing on the battlefield will likely contribute to the culmination of the offensive in Donbas before capturing Bakhmut, Slovyansk, or any other major city in Donetsk Oblast.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces made marginal gains south of Bakhmut but are unlikely to be able to effectively leverage these advances to take full control of Bakhmut itself.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks north of Kharkiv City, east of Siversk, and east of Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces are continuing to fortify and strengthen positions in Zaporizhia and Kherson Oblasts in anticipation of Ukrainian counteroffensives.**
- **Ukrainian forces are continuing to strike Russian strongholds along the Southern Axis.**
- **Russian forces continued to withdraw military equipment from storage in Omsk and faced challenges with repairing damaged combat vehicles.**
- **Russian occupation officials are continuing to set conditions for the annexation of occupied territories to the Russian Federation and to extend administrative control of occupied areas of Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 25, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 24

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Layne Philipson, George Barros and Frederick W. Kagan

July 24, 6:30 pm ET

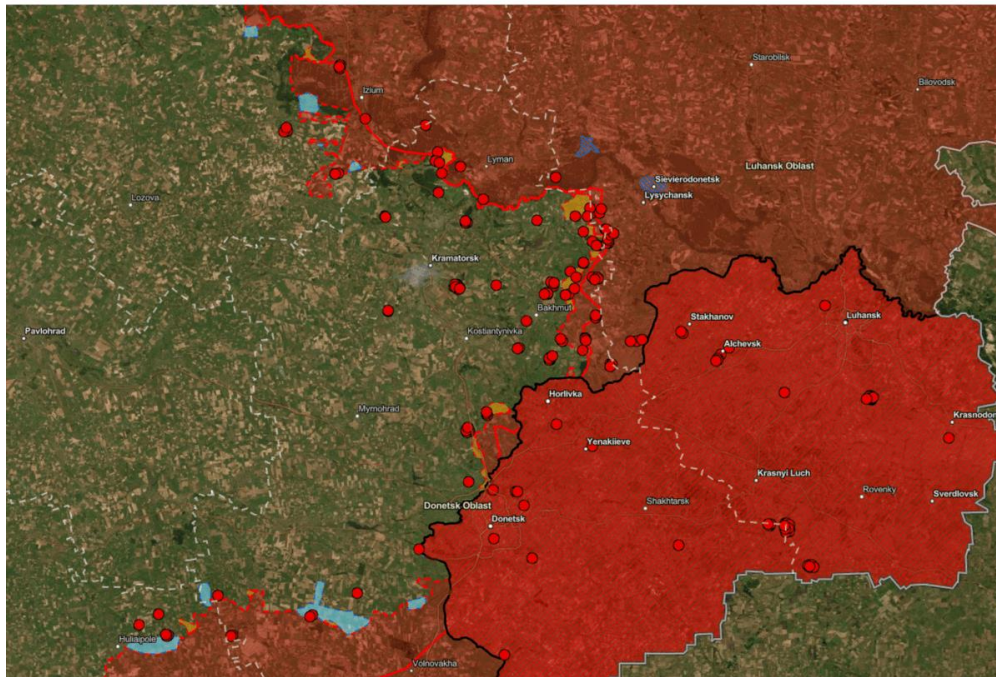
Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Ukrainian officials are increasingly acknowledging Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in Kherson Oblast. Kherson Oblast Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan stated on July 24 that Ukrainian forces are undertaking unspecified counteroffensive actions in Kherson Oblast.[1] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on July 23 that Ukrainian forces are advancing “step by step” in Kherson Oblast.[2] His statement does not make clear whether he is referring to small, ongoing Ukrainian advances in Kherson Oblast or a broader counteroffensive.[3] Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command reported on July 24 that Ukrainian forces are firing on Russian transport facilities in Kherson Oblast to impede maneuverability and logistics support. This activity is consistent with support to an active counteroffensive or conditions-setting for an upcoming counteroffensive.[4] Khlan also said that Ukrainian strikes on Russian-controlled bridges around Kherson City only aim to prevent Russian forces from moving equipment into the city without stopping food and other essential supplies from entering the city.[5]

Alarm in the Russian nationalist information space continues to grow as the pace of Russian operations slows in the face of successful Ukrainian high-mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) strikes on key Russian logistics and command-and-control nodes. Moscow Calling, a medium-sized Russian Telegram channel with 31,000 subscribers, posted an appraisal of the entirety of Russian operations in Ukraine since February 24.[6] Moscow Calling defined three distinct phases of the war—the first spanning from initial invasion to the withdrawal of Russian troops from Kyiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv Oblasts and the second spanning between that point and the introduction of Western-provided HIMARS.[7] Moscow Calling notably defined the arrival of HIMARS as a distinct turning point in the war and stated that previously provided Western weapons systems (such as NLAWs, Javelins, Stingers, and Bayraktars) did very little against Russian artillery bombardment (they are not designed or intended to counter artillery attack), but that HIMARS changed everything for Russian capabilities in Ukraine.[8] Moscow Calling strongly insinuated that recent Ukrainian strikes on Russian warehouses, communication hubs, and rear bases are having a devastating and potentially irreversible impact on the development of future Russian offensives.[9]

This post is consistent with previous reports from Western defense officials that Russian troops are being forced to engage in various HIMARS mitigation tactics on the battlefield, including camouflage measures and constantly changing the location of equipment groupings.[10] These mitigation tactics are impeding Russian forces from conducting the massive artillery barrages that they have widely employed over the course of the war, as evidenced by NASA Fire Information for Resource Management (FIRMS) data that shows consistently fewer observed heat anomalies over the frontline in Donbas since the introduction of HIMARS to Ukraine.

NASA FIRMS Data near Donbas on July 15, 2022



[Source: NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System over Donbas, July 15 – July 23 and Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community]

The Kremlin is likely facing mounting (if still very limited) domestic dissent from within ethnic minority enclaves, which are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the Kremlin's force generation efforts. Vasily Matenov, founder of the "Asians of Russia" organization, stated in early July that he had officially registered the organization in order to advocate for "endangered and small-numbered peoples who are discriminated against by the Russian state."^[11] Matenov emphasized that the preliminary goal of "Asians of Russia" is to stop the war in Ukraine due to devastating statistics on the combat deaths of soldiers from minority groups.^[12] Similarly, Advisor to Ukraine's Minister of Internal Affairs Anton Gerashchenko cited Ukrainian sources that claim Russian authorities pay triple amounts to families of deceased soldiers from Moscow compared to families of soldiers from the minority-dominant region of Buryatia.^[13] As ISW has previously reported, protest groups in ethnic minority enclaves have already formed in Tuva and Buryatia, and these communities will likely continue to protest the Kremlin's reliance on drawing combat power from peripheral groups of Russian society.^[14]

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian officials are increasingly acknowledging Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in Kherson Oblast.**
- **The Kremlin is facing mounting (if still very limited) domestic dissent from ethnic minorities who are disproportionately bearing the burden of the Russian war in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces attempted limited ground assaults northwest of Slovyansk, east of Siversk, and south of Bakhmut on July 24.**
- **Ukrainian strikes have damaged all three Russian-controlled bridges leading into Kherson City within the past week.**
- **Russian forces attempted limited ground assaults in Kherson Oblast.**
- **The Kremlin continued constituting regional volunteer battalions and is leveraging private military companies' recruitment drives to generate combat power.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continued setting conditions for annexation referenda in occupied territories and are recruiting Russian civilians for reconstruction efforts.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 23

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 23, 6:00 pm ET

[Click here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

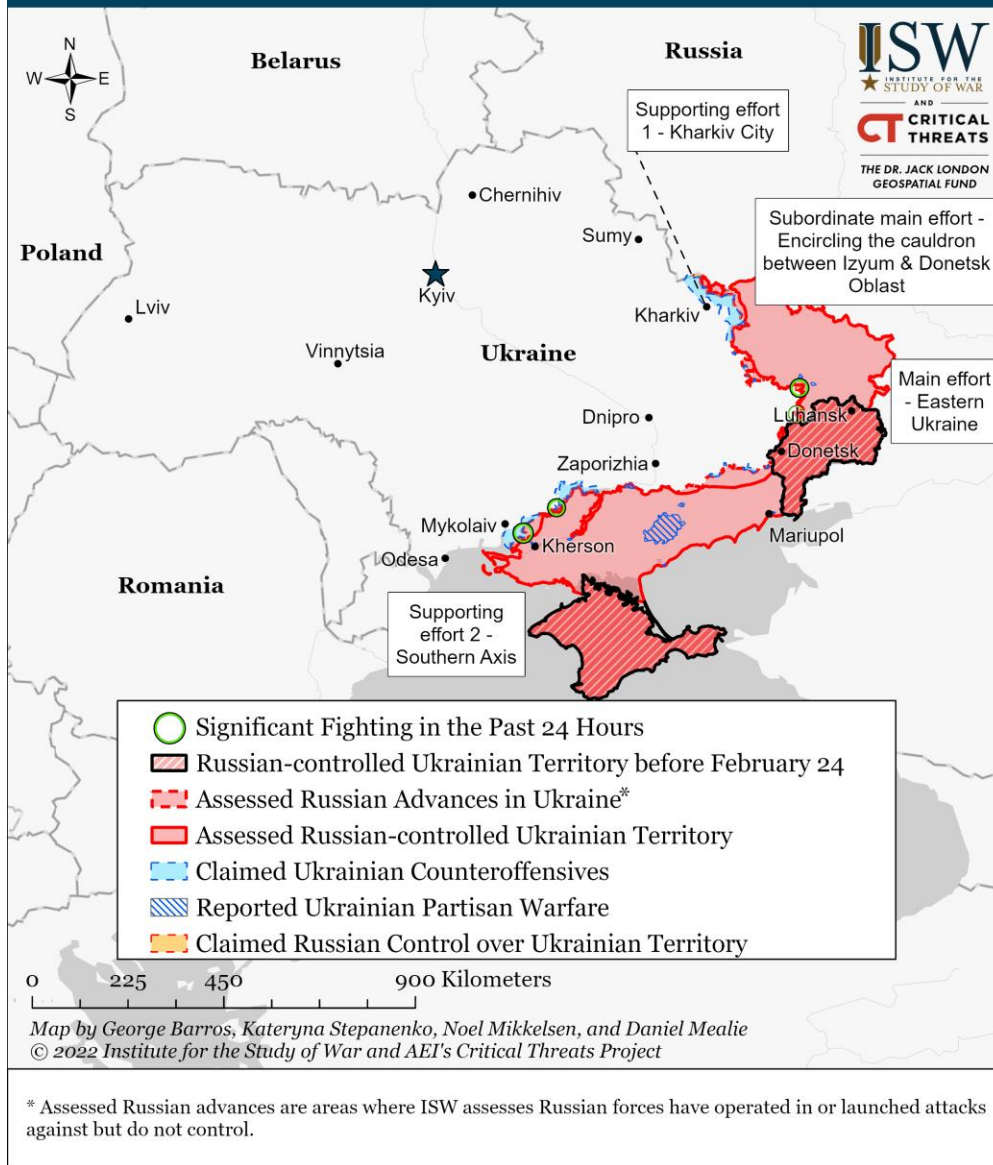
Ukrainian forces are likely preparing to launch or have launched a counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast as of July 23, but open-source visibility on the progress and tempo of the counteroffensive will likely be limited and lag behind events. Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Administration Adviser Serhiy Khlan stated on July 23 that Ukrainian forces have seized unspecified settlements in Kherson Oblast but called on Ukrainian civilians to remain silent on the progress of the counteroffensive until Ukrainian authorities release official statements.[1] Foreign Policy National Security Reporter Jack Detsch reported on July 22 that an unspecified senior US defense official stated that Ukrainian forces have recaptured unspecified “portions of Russian-occupied villages” in Kherson over the past week of July 15-22, indicating that Ukrainian forces have made some unspecified territorial advances along frontlines.[2] The area between the front line and Kherson City is rural and primarily composed of small settlements that are less likely to report on force movements and engagements, allowing control-of-terrain in this area to change without evidence appearing in open-source reporting. Russian authorities additionally have no incentive to report on Ukrainian territorial gains. The informational dynamics that allow ISW to report on Russian offensive operations with relatively little lag are thus inverted in this situation. ISW will report on the progress of any Ukrainian counteroffensives to the best of its ability within these constraints.

Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov seemingly confirmed that Colonel General Sergey Kuzovlev has replaced Army General Aleksandr Dvornikov as acting commander of Russia’s Southern Military District (SMD).[3] Kadyrov stated that Kuzovlev, to whom he explicitly referred as acting commander of the SMD, visited Chechnya on July 23 in order to inspect Kadyrov’s “Akhmat” battalions.[4] Kuzovlev had previously served as chief of staff of the SMD and commanded the Russian grouping in Syria from November 2020 to February 2021.[5] Kuzovlev’s visit and inspection of Kadyrov’s forces, which comes two days after Kadyrov announced that these battalions will not be immediately deploying into Ukraine, may support other hints that Kadyrov is facing mounting domestic pressure.[6] The anti-Kadyrov Sheikh Mansour battalion reportedly announced an insurgency against Kadyrov’s regime on July 21, and Kadyrov may want to hold the newly formed Akhmat battalions in Chechnya to handle any local unrest.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces are likely preparing to launch, or have already launched, a counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast.**
- **Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov indicated that Colonel General Sergey Kuzovlev is the acting commander of the Southern Military District.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited reconnaissance operations east of Bakhmut and continued limited ground attacks northwest of Slovyansk, east of Siversk, and south of Bakhmut.**
- **The Kremlin continued to form regional volunteer battalions and likely intends to have 16 such battalions formed by the end of July.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are continuing to prepare for referenda on the annexation of occupied areas into the Russian Federation and are taking measures to isolate occupied areas from the non-Russian information space.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 22

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Layne Philipson, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 22, 6:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

The United States announced a new \$270 million security package for Ukraine, and Ukrainian officials detailed their procedures for keeping track of Western weapons on July 22.[1] The US package includes an additional four high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS), 36,000 artillery

ammunition rounds, anti-armor systems, and 580 Phoenix Ghost drones.[2] Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksii Danilov reiterated that the Ukrainian government is employing multiple monitoring mechanisms to keep track of weapons deliveries to Ukraine.[3] Ukraine's Modern Information and Analytical System of the Main Situational Center (COTA) reportedly allows Ukrainian officials to monitor the status of arms deliveries to Ukrainian frontlines and works in tandem with NATO's LOGFAS logistics and accounting control system.[4] Danilov's statement is likely a response to an ongoing Russian information operation that seeks to discount Ukraine as a trustworthy recipient of Western military aid.[5]

Key Takeaways

- **The United States announced an additional \$270 million security package for Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian officials reiterated that they are employing monitoring mechanisms to track and account for the delivery of Western weapons to Ukrainian frontlines.**
- **Russian forces conducted ground attacks east of Siversk and to the east and south of Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to advance northwest of Donetsk City.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted limited positional battles north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces conducted localized ground attacks near the Kherson-Mykolaiv Oblast border.**
- **Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov announced that the newly-formed Chechen "West-Akhmat" battalion will not be immediately deployed into Ukraine and will stay in Chechnya.**
- **Head of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Denis Pushilin signed a cooperation agreement with the occupation head of Kharkiv Oblast, indicating that the Kremlin intends to integrate Kharkiv Oblast into the Russian Federation.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 22, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 21

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Layne Philipson, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 21, 5:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces conducted a few limited and highly localized ground attacks on July 21. The current Russian operational tempo is not markedly different from what it was during the officially declared operational pause between July 7 and July 16. Russian forces continued to conduct minor

attacks throughout that period to the northwest of Slovyansk and around the Siversk and Bakhmut areas without capturing any decisive ground.[1] Since July 16, Russian troops have continued local attacks to the east of Siversk as well as east and south of Bakhmut; they have not made any major territorial gains in these areas as of July 21. The Russian grouping northwest of Slovyansk has in fact conducted fewer ground attacks along the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border than it did during the official operational pause. The lack of successful ground attacks beyond the Slovyansk, Siversk, and Bakhmut areas is consistent with ISW's assessment that the Russian offensive is likely to culminate without capturing Slovyansk or Bakhmut.[2]

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on July 21 that Russian troops have used up to 55-60% of Russia's pre-war reserve of high-precision missiles.[3] GUR spokesperson Vadym Skibitsky specified that these high-precision missiles include Kh-101, Kh-555, Iskander, and Kalibr systems, which he stated Russian forces have been using less frequently, partially due to the effect of Western sanctions on the availability of needed components for high-precision systems.[4] On the other hand, Ukrainian forces have recently acquired an influx of Western-provided high-precision systems such as high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS), which they are using to a more decisive effect than the Russians have been achieving with their precision systems. Russian forces will likely continue to employ their reserves of lower-precision Soviet weapons systems, but the decisiveness of these strikes, compared to the impact of Ukrainian HIMARS strikes, is likely to remain limited.[5]

Key Takeaways

- **The current Russian operational tempo is not markedly different from the pace of Russian offensive operations during the official Russian operational pause, and Russian forces are unlikely to be able to take significant ground in the coming weeks.**
- **Russia has likely used as much as 55-60% of its high-precision weaponry reserve.**
- **Russian forces continued limited ground attacks to the east of Siversk and south of Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces conducted an unsuccessful ground attack north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack in Kherson Oblast.**
- **Russian forces may be storing equipment in Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant facilities to protect it against Ukrainian strikes.**
- **Russia's Murmansk Oblast is reportedly forming a volunteer battalion.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 21, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 20

Karolina Hird, George Barros, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 20, 6:15 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

The current Russian offensive may secure limited additional territorial gains in Donbas northeast of the E40 highway but will likely culminate before seizing major populated areas such as Slovyansk or Bakhmut. Russian forces have not made significant advances towards Slovyansk or along the Siversk-Bakhmut salient in the past few weeks and are continuing to degrade their own offensive combat power in localized fights for small and relatively un-important settlements throughout Donetsk

Oblast. Russian troops have notably been attempting to take Siversk since the capture of Lysychansk and the Luhansk Oblast border on July 3 and have still not reached the city as of July 20.^[1] Similarly, Russian troops have failed to launch direct assaults on Bakhmut and have largely impaled themselves on fights for small settlements to its east and south. Efforts to advance on Slovyansk have mostly ground to a halt and have made no meaningful gains for weeks. The renewal of active ground offensives following the brief operational pause has not yet translated into meaningful Russian forward progress, although it is possible that either steady Russian pressure or the completion of Russian efforts to rebuild combat power could generate limited gains in the coming days or weeks.

Russian troops are now struggling to move across relatively sparsely-settled and open terrain. They will encounter terrain much more conducive to the Ukrainian defenders the closer they get to the E40 around Slovyansk and Bakhmut due to the increasing population density and built-up nature of these areas (see map in-line with text). The current Russian offensive in Donbas is therefore highly likely to culminate somewhere along the E40 in the coming weeks.

Map of Eastern Ukraine

Legend: Darker-shaded hromadas (a county-like administrative subdivision) are more heavily populated than lighter-shaded hromadas and should, in principle, prove more challenging for Russian forces to capture relative to sparsely populated hromadas.

Scale: 0 10 20 40 Kilometers

Map by: George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, and Daniel Meadlie
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	Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24		Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	Population of Amalgamated Hromada (as of 2020)
	Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine *		Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives	
	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory		Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare	
				 up to 15,000  up to 25,000  up tp 150,000  up to 250,000  greater than 250.000

[Map showing population density in Donbas as of 2020 in comparison with ISW's assessed control of terrain in Donetsk Oblast as of July 20, 2022. Russian forces will likely face challenges taking control of the darker-grey areas, which represent more densely-populated hromadas and are largely concentrated along the E40 highway between Slovyansk and Bakhmut]

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territorial goals beyond Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Lavrov held an interview with state-owned media outlet RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan wherein he stated that the geography of the "special operation" has changed since March and now includes not just the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics, but also Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts and a number of other unspecified territories.[2] Lavrov also warned that these goals will expand if the West continues to provide Ukraine with long-range weapons. Lavrov's calls for maximalist territorial objectives are notably divorced from the slow and grinding reality of recent Russian operations in Ukraine as discussed above. Ukrainian counteroffensive pressure is complicating Russian efforts to consolidate military control of occupied Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, and it is unclear how the Kremlin will generate the offensive combat power needed to take significant new amounts of Ukrainian territory.

The Russian Defense Ministry publicly identified Lieutenant General Andrey Sychevoy as the commander of the Western force grouping in Ukraine on July 20.[3] The Russian force groupings in Ukraine appear to follow the structure of established Russian military districts. Ukraine's Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) had previously reported that Sychevoy replaced Commander Alexander Zhuravlev as the Western Military District Commander.[4] Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu instructed Sychevoy to focus on destroying Ukrainian UAVs operating near the Ukraine-Russia border, indicating that the Western force grouping is likely operating on the Kharkiv City Axis.[5] Russian forces have thus apparently split Kharkiv Oblast into two axes: the Western force grouping operating towards Kharkiv City and the Eastern force grouping operating in the Izyum-Slovyansk direction.[6]

The Russians have identified commanders of the southern, central, and eastern groups of forces, corresponding to their respective military districts and oriented on Bakhmut, the Izyum area, and Siversk respectively. They have notably failed to identify any commander of Russian forces operating in occupied southern Ukraine, however. The Russian commander of forces on the Southern Axis could be the commander of the Russian 7th Guards Mountain Airborne (VDV) Division based in Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Krai, or of the Black Sea Fleet's 22nd Army Corps, based in Simferopol, Crimea, respectively, as there is no other obvious military district from which he might be drawn.[7]

Ukrainian troops rescued a cat during clearing operations on Snake Island and evacuated it back to the Ukrainian mainland on July 20.[8] The cat reportedly survived the duration of the Russian occupation of the island.

Key Takeaways

- **The current Russian offensive will likely make marginal territorial gains northeast of the E40 highway in Donetsk before culminating along the E40.**
- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russia is pursuing expanded territorial gains in Ukraine beyond Luhansk and Donetsk Oblast, confirming ISW's assessment that the Kremlin seeks to capture territory beyond Donbas.**
- **Russian forces resumed limited ground attacks northwest of Slovyansk and around the Donetsk City-Avdiivka area.**
- **Russian forces continued localized ground assaults east of Siversk and made marginal gains northeast of Bakhmut.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted the second consecutive high-precision strike against the Antonivskyi Bridge-- a major Russian logistics artery east of Kherson City.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are likely propagandizing recent Ukrainian high-precision strikes and partisan activity to set conditions for mass deportations of Ukrainian citizens to Russian territory.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 20, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 19

Karolina Hird, George Barros, Katherine Lawlor, Layne Philipson, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 19, 7:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Calls among Russian nationalist and pro-war voices for Russian President Vladimir Putin to expand Russia's war aims, mobilize the state fully for war, and drop the pretext that Russia is not

engaged in a war reached a crescendo on July 19. Former Russian militant commander and nationalist milblogger Igor Girkin presented an extensive list of military, economic, and political actions that he argues the Kremlin must take to win the war in Ukraine; first among this list is abandoning the rhetoric of the “special military operation” and defining the official goals of the war in Ukraine.[1] Girkin advocated for expansive territorial aims beyond the Kremlin’s stated ambitions in Donbas, including the reunification of the entire territory of “Novorossiya” (which Girkin maintains includes Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts as well as Kryvyi Rih) with the Russian Federation and the creation of a Malorossiya state (all of Ukraine up to the Polish border), which Girkin claims should be reunified with Russia through the Russia-Belarus Union State. Girkin also called for the Kremlin to shift the Russian economy fully to a war footing and to carry out extensive mobilization measures including forced conscription and the (further) suspension of Russians’ rights.[2] Girkin has often criticized what he views as a lack of ambition and decisive action in the Kremlin’s handling of the war in Ukraine through his calls for maximalist objectives and measures to support territorial gains. His newest list of demands adds to the growing discontent within the Russian pro-war nationalist zeitgeist.[3]

While Girkin’s July 19 post is an acerbic critique of the Kremlin’s intentions in Ukraine, other Russian milbloggers sought to shape a narrative favoring Putin while advancing the same maximalist aims by suggesting that the Kremlin has been purposefully setting conditions for a protracted war in Ukraine since the war began. Russian milblogger Yuri Kotyenok claimed that Russia has been pursuing the “Syrianization” of the war in Ukraine by never articulating specific deadlines or goals for operations in Ukraine.[4] The explicit invocation of protracted Russian operations in Syria suggests that certain Russian nationalist voices are setting conditions for a long war in a way that saves face for the Kremlin given Russia’s failure to secure its military objectives in Ukraine in the very short period that the Kremlin initially planned.

Putin could simply ignore the milbloggers, although he has shown concern for their positions in the recent past, or he could play off their narratives in several ways.[5] He might wait and see what resonance their calls for full mobilization and broader war aims have within the portions of the Russian population he cares most about. He might hope that their semi-independent calls for more extreme measures could fuel support for an expansion of aims and mobilization that he desires but feels Russians remain unprepared to accept. He may instead reject their calls for grander ambitions and greater sacrifices, thereby presenting himself as the moderate leader refraining from demanding too much from his people.

US officials reported that Russia plans to annex occupied Ukrainian territory as soon as autumn 2022, confirming ISW’s May 2022 assessment. US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby announced that the Kremlin is beginning to roll out a version of its 2014 “annexation playbook” in Ukraine and is “examining detailed plans” to annex Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and all of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, citing newly declassified intelligence.[6] Kirby confirmed ISW’s long-running assessment that the Kremlin has installed illegitimate proxy officials, forced use of the ruble, replaced Ukrainian telecommunications and broadcast infrastructure with Russian alternatives, and forced Ukrainians to apply for Russian passports to accomplish basic tasks in occupied territories.[7] As ISW wrote on May 13, Putin’s timeline for annexation is likely contingent on the extent to which he understands the degraded state of the Russian military in Ukraine.[8] He may intend to capture the remainder of Donetsk Oblast before annexing all occupied territories, which would likely force him to postpone annexation. Russia’s degraded forces are unlikely to occupy all of Donetsk Oblast before Russia’s September 11 unified voting day for local and gubernatorial elections across the country, the most likely date for annexation referenda to be held.[9] The Kremlin could also postpone these Russian regional and local elections to limit expressions of domestic dissatisfaction with the Russian invasion of Ukraine—independent Latvia-based Russian language newspaper *Meduza* reported in May that members of Russia’s Federal Security Service and National Security Council were lobbying to postpone the September 2022 elections.[10]

Putin could leverage nuclear threats to deter a Ukrainian counteroffensive into annexed Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts.[11] After annexation, Putin may state, directly or obliquely, that Russian doctrine permitting the use of nuclear weapons to defend Russian territory applies to newly annexed territories. Such actions would threaten Ukraine and its partners with nuclear attack if Ukrainian counteroffensives to liberate Russian-occupied territory continue. Putin may believe that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would restore Russian deterrence after his disastrous invasion shattered Russia’s conventional deterrent capabilities, although previous Russian hints at Moscow’s willingness to use

nuclear weapons have proven hollow. **Ukraine and its Western partners may have a narrowing window of opportunity to support a Ukrainian counteroffensive into occupied Ukrainian territory before the Kremlin annexes that territory.**^[12]

Russian milbloggers are increasingly openly criticizing the Russian military for failing to address structural problems with Russian Airborne Forces (VDV), highlighting the VDV's failure to fight the war as it had trained in peacetime, a failing that played no small role in the general Russian failures during the initial invasion. Russian milblogger *Military Informant* stated that Russian VDV has not adopted force structure and tactics reforms that the Russian military already knew were necessary prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.^[13] *Military Informant* stated that lightly armored Russian VDV vehicles (such as BMD and BTR-D) are too heavy to enable effective airborne mobility—especially in contested airspace—and too light to provide sufficient protection in maneuver warfare. Russian milblogger Alexander Sladkov similarly noted that Russian VDV forces' structural reliance on a small number of lightly armored fighting vehicles is a liability.^[14] *Military Informant* praised how the Russian VDV previously practiced using light unarmored vehicles for higher mobility in three consecutive years of annual capstone command staff exercises (Tsentr 2019, Kavkaz 2020, and Zapad 2021) but noted that these adaptations did not have time to “take root” before the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.^[15]

The Russian military's failure to implement lessons learned—or to learn the right lessons—from previous exercises or combat is an ongoing trend that ISW has observed.^[16] The most prominent example of this phenomenon was the Russian military's failure to create a cohesive command and control system for the amalgamation of approximately 120 Russian battalion tactical groups (BTGs) assembled for the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine after experiencing successes operating smaller numbers of BTGs in Ukraine in 2014 and in Syria in 2016.^[17]

Key Takeaways

- **Calls made by Russian nationalist and pro-war voices for the Kremlin to officially define operations in Ukraine as a war, conduct general mobilization, and pursue expanded territorial goals reached a crescendo on July 19 with some criticizing the Kremlin and others claiming that Putin has been preparing for the “Syrianization” of the war all along.**
- **The Kremlin will likely attempt to illegally annex occupied Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts into Russia as early as September 11, 2022.**
- **Russian milbloggers highlighted the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) failure to fight as they had trained—a critique that helps explain the general Russian failures during the initial invasion of Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to resume offensive operations toward Slovyansk from southeast of Izyum and around Barvinkove.**
- **Russian forces continued ground attacks to the east of Siversk and had partial success in ground attacks to the east of Bakhmut.**
- **Russian authorities are continuing to leverage unconventional sources of combat power to avoid general mobilization.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are escalating law enforcement measures to protect administrative control of occupied areas.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 19, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 18

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, George Barros, Layne Philipson, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 18, 5:30 pm ET

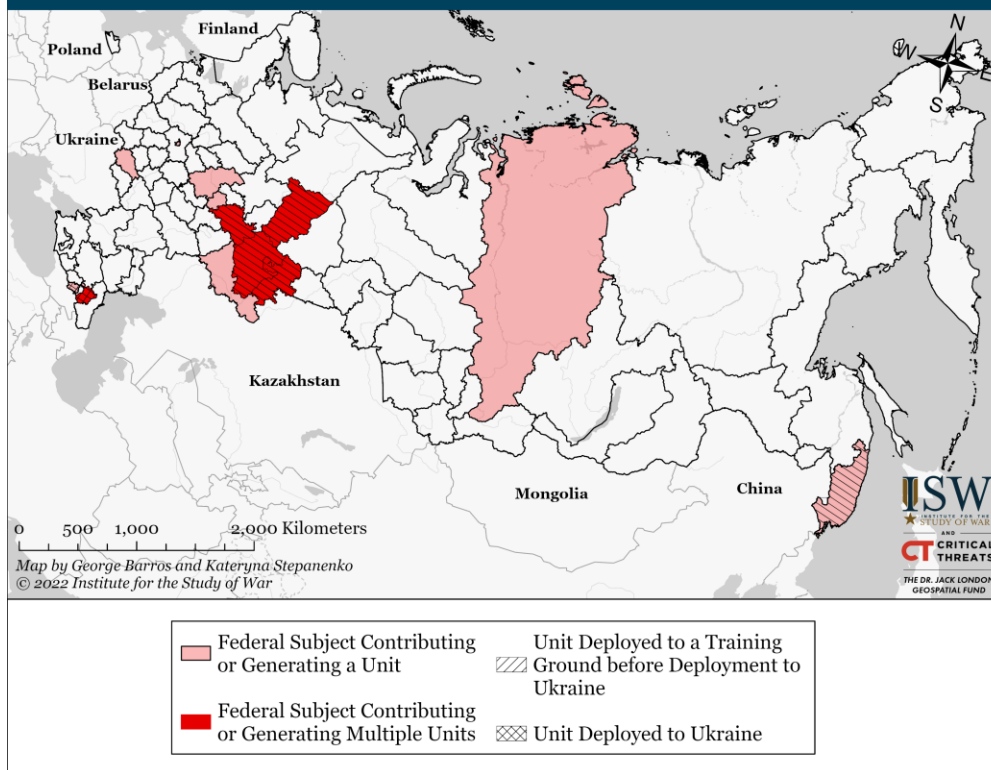
[Click here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu's July 18 meeting with the commander of the Eastern group of forces Lieutenant General Rustam Muradov supports ISW's assessment that Moscow will not prioritize an attack to seize Slovyansk in this stage of the operation but will instead focus

on seizing Siversk and Bakhmut.^[1] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on July 18 that Shoigu inspected the Eastern group and directed Muradov to prioritize the destruction of Ukrainian long-range missiles and artillery systems. This is the first time ISW has observed explicit mention of the Eastern force grouping operating in Ukraine in this phase of the war. The Russian MoD previously reported that the Central and Southern force groups took part in the capture of Luhansk Oblast under the leadership of Colonel General Aleksandr Lapin and Army General Sergey Surovikin.^[2] The Eastern group of forces is likely comprised of elements of the Russian Eastern Military District (EMD), which have been active along the Izyum axis in Kharkiv Oblast.^[3] It is still unclear whether Muradov also directly controls operations around Kharkiv City. Muradov's forces are operating in the Izyum-Sloviansk direction ostensibly with the objective of eventually seizing Sloviansk itself, and it is noteworthy that Shoigu did not direct Muradov to prioritize taking ground along this axis at this time. Muradov holds a lower rank than both Lapin and Surovikin, suggesting that the Kremlin considers the Izyum-Sloviansk area to be a lower priority than capturing territory in Donetsk Oblast as part of the wider Donbas campaign. The Kremlin likely is focusing military resources and high-rank leadership on localized and discrete gains around Siversk and Bakhmut, despite Shoigu's earlier calls for the intensification of operations along all axes of advance.^[4]

Russian President Vladimir Putin's likely effort to shield ethnic Russians from high levels of mobilization may trigger resistance in some of the ethnic enclaves that seem to be disproportionately bearing the burden of war. Russian Telegram channel Rybar released a report on July 18 about the Novaya Tuva movement- an anti-war organization comprised of activists from the Tuvan ethnic minority enclave.^[5] Rybar accused the Novaya Tuva movement of disseminating anti-war propaganda and inciting ethnic discord within the Russian Federation. This report is noteworthy in the context of the recent increase in the formation of regionally-based volunteer battalions through Russia, many of which fall along distinct ethnic lines.^[6] ISW and others have previously noted the prevalence of non-ethnic Russian battalions fighting in Ukraine, which include troops from Chechnya, South Ossetia, Tuva, Tartarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, and others.^[7] These indicators suggest that Putin may be unwilling to conduct general mobilization in part due to a reluctance to mobilize large numbers of ethnic Russians. Rybar's post as well as previous reporting on a "Free Buryatia" anti-war group bring to the fore the risk that Putin's apparent desire to have non-Russians bear the brunt of the war at this stage could create domestic tension in these regions.

Confirmed Russian Regions (Federal Subjects) Generating "Volunteer" Units to Fight in Ukraine as of July 15, 2022



Key Takeaways

- The Russian Ministry of Defense's meeting with the leadership of the Eastern grouping of forces in Ukraine suggests that the Kremlin will not focus on seizing Slovyansk at this stage of the campaign but will instead prioritize attempting to seize Siversk and Bakhmut.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin's likely effort to put the burden of supporting operations in Ukraine on ethnic minorities to avoid conducting a general mobilization of ethnic Russians may be sparking resistance in ethnic enclaves in Russia.
- Russian forces conducted a series of ground attacks east of Siversk and south of Bakhmut.
- Russian forces intensified efforts to advance on Avdiivka and conducted limited ground assaults along the Donetsk City-Avdiivka frontline.
- Russian authorities are continuing to integrate occupied areas into the Russian trade economy.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 18, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 17

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, George Barros, Layne Philipson, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 17, 5:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces are continuing a measured return from the operational pause and conducted limited ground attacks in Donetsk Oblast on July 17. As ISW has previously noted, the end of the Russian operational pause is unlikely to create a massive new wave of ground assaults across multiple axes of advance despite Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's public order for exactly that. Russian troops are prioritizing advances around Siversk and Bakhmut while maintaining defensive positions north

of Kharkiv City and along the Southern Axis. Russian forces continued to set conditions for resumed offensives toward Slovyansk, shelled settlements along the Izyum-Slovyansk salient, and otherwise conducted artillery, missile, and air strikes throughout Ukraine. The Russian Ministry of Defense notably did not claim any new territorial gains on July 17. ISW continues to forecast that the end of the operational pause will be characterized by a fluctuating and staggered resumption of ground offensives.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued a measured return from the operational pause and did not make any confirmed territorial gains on July 17.**
- **Russian forces continued limited ground assaults around Siversk, Bakhmut, and Donetsk City and otherwise fired at civilian and military infrastructure throughout the Donbas.**
- **Russian forces focused on defensive operations north of Kharkiv City and along the Southern Axis.**
- **The Kremlin may be setting long-term conditions for force generation efforts in anticipation of protracted hostilities in Ukraine.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are likely using the threat of partisan activities to justify harsher societal controls in occupied areas.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 17, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 16

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 16, 6 pm ET

The Russian Defense Ministry announced that the Russian operational pause has concluded on July 16, confirming ISW's July 15 assessment.[1] Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu ordered Southern Group Commander General of the Army Sergey Surovikin and Central Group Commander Colonel General Alexander Lapin to increase offensive operations on all axes on July 16, but the tempo of the resuming Russian offensive will likely fluctuate or stutter over the coming days.[2] Russian forces

conducted fewer ground assaults on all axes on July 16 than on July 15, but maintained increased artillery and missile strikes on July 16.[3]

Shoigu indicated that Surovikin and Lapin will both continue to command forces on the Eastern Axis even though a force concentration and effort of this size should only require a single, very senior overall commander. Surovikin should in principle be in overall command because he outranks Lapin. Shoigu has not even named Surovikin as the head of Russia's Southern Military District (SMD) despite the likely ousting of SMD Commander General of the Army Alexander Dvornikov and despite Surovikin's experience commanding the Southern Grouping in Ukraine. Lapin, in contrast, has been and remains commander of the Central Military District.[4] The Kremlin's failure to use the operational pause to reorganize the Russian military command structure in Ukraine and its decision to instead retain an ad-hoc command structure is very odd. The apparent dual command of two very senior generals over operations in a very small area may hinder Russian operations going forward.

Ukrainian HIMARS strikes against Russian ammunition depots, logistics elements, and command and control are likely degrading Russian artillery campaigns. Ukrainian officials confirmed that American-supplied HIMARS arrived in Ukraine on June 23.[5] Ukrainian operators have been using the HIMARS to strike multiple Russian targets – notably ammunition depots – since June 25.[6] The destruction of these ammunition depots has likely degraded Russian forces' ability to sustain high volumes of artillery fire along front lines. Detected heat anomalies from NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS) remotely sensed data decreased significantly in Donbas starting around July 10.

Key Takeaways

- **The Russian Ministry of Defense announced the cessation of the operational pause, confirming ISW's July 15 assessment that Russian forces are likely resuming ground attacks along multiple axes of advance. The cessation of the operational pause is unlikely to lead to a massive increase in ground attacks across Ukraine but will rather likely be characterized by continued limited ground assaults focused on the Slovyansk-Siversk-Bakhmut salient.**
- **The Kremlin may have ordered Russian forces to take control of the entirety of Kharkiv Oblast, despite the extraordinary low likelihood of Russian success in such an effort.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground assaults around Siversk and Bakhmut and otherwise fired on Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure across Eastern Ukraine.**
- **Russian occupation authorities likely are responding to the perceived threat of Ukrainian partisan activities by strengthening administrative regimes in occupied areas.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 15

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, Layne Philipson, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 15, 7:25 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces are likely emerging from their operational pause as of July 15. Russian forces carried out a series of limited ground assaults northwest of Slovyansk, southeast of Siversk, along the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway, southeast of Bakhmut, and southwest of Donetsk City.[1] These assaults may indicate that Russian forces are attempting to resume their offensive operations in Donbas. The assaults are still small-scale and were largely unsuccessful. If the operational pause is truly over, the Russians will likely continue and expand such assaults in the coming 72 hours. The Russians might instead alternate briefer pauses with strengthening attacks over a number of days before moving into a full-scale offensive operation. A 10-day-long operational pause is insufficient to fully regenerate Russian forces for large-scale offensive operations. The Russian military seems to feel continuous pressure to resume and continue offensive operations before it can reasonably have rebuilt sufficient combat power to achieve decisive effects at a reasonable cost to itself, however. The resuming Russian offensive may therefore fluctuate or even stall for some time.

Ukrainian HIMARS strikes have likely killed or wounded four Russian 106th Airborne Division deputy commanders. Russian news outlets reported the deaths of 106th Division's deputy commanders Colonel Sergey Kuzminov, Colonel Andrey Vasiliev, and Colonel Maxim Kudrin, seemingly confirming Ukrainian claims that HIMARS strikes on Shaktarsk on July 9 killed or wounded a significant portion of the 106th's leadership.[2] Ukraine's Center for Strategic Communications claimed on July 12 that one unspecified 106th Airborne Division deputy commander remains in critical condition.[3]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are likely emerging from their operational pause, launching ground assaults north of Slovyansk, southeast of Siversk, around Bakhmut, and southwest of Donetsk City.**
- **Russian forces continued to defend occupied positions in the Kharkiv City direction to prevent Ukrainian forces from advancing toward the Russian border in Kharkiv Oblast.**
- **Russian forces continued their systematic attacks on civilian infrastructure targeting residential infrastructure, recreational facilities, and educational institutions in Mykolaiv City on July 15.**
- **Chelyabinsk Oblast officials announced the completion of a volunteer battalion on July 15.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continued to institute new societal control measures in occupied territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 15, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 14

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Layne Philipson, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 14, 8:00 pm ET

[Click here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russia's operational pause largely continued, with limited Russian ground assaults along the Slovyansk-Siversk-Bakhmut salient. Russian forces continued heavy shelling, missile attacks, and airstrikes all along the front line. The Russians will likely launch a larger-scale and more determined

offensive along the Slovyansk-Siversk-Bakhmut line soon, but there are no indications yet of how soon that attack will begin or exactly where it will focus.

The Russian missile strike on Vinnytsia on July 14 was part of a systematic Russian campaign of attacks on residential areas of cities in Ukraine.^[1] Ukrainian President's Office Deputy Head Kyrylo Tymoshenko reported that Russian forces launched Kalibr missiles from a submarine at the Vinnytsia city center.^[2] The Ukrainian General Staff stated that the strike resulted in at least 22 civilian deaths, about 100 injured, and 39 missing people.^[3] Russian forces also launched missiles at a hotel, educational facilities, a shopping center, and transport infrastructure in Mykolaiv city.^[4]

Key Takeaways

- **Russia continued its campaign of systematic attacks on residential areas in Ukrainian cities with strikes on Vinnytsia, Kharkiv City, and Mykolaiv City.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to advance on Siversk but their progress is unclear.**
- **Russian troops conducted limited ground assaults around Bakhmut and Slovyansk but made no gains.**
- **Chechen Leader Ramazan Kadyrov claimed that one of the four new battalions he has been forming deployed to Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 14, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 13

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 13, 7:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

The Kremlin likely ordered Russian "federal subjects" (regions) to form volunteer battalions to participate in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, instead of declaring partial or full mobilization in Russia. Russian war correspondent and milblogger Maksim Fomin stated that Russia has begun a

“volunteer mobilization,” where every region must generate at least one volunteer battalion.[1] The term “volunteer mobilization” likely implies that the Kremlin ordered the 85 “federal subjects” (regions, including occupied Sevastopol and Crimea) to recruit and financially incentivize volunteers to form new battalions, rather than referring to literal mobilization relying on conscription or the compulsory activation of all reservists in Russia. Russian outlets reported that regional officials recruit men up to 50 years old (or 60 for separate military specialties) for six-month contracts and offer salaries averaging 220,000 to 350,000 rubles per month (approximately \$3,750 to \$6,000).[2] Separate regions offer an immediate enlistment bonus that averages 200,000 rubles (approximately \$3,400) issued from the region’s budget and social benefits for the servicemen and their families.[3] Russian media has already confirmed the creation or deployment of volunteer battalions in Kursk, Primorsky Krai, Republic of Bashkortostan, Chuvashia Republic, Chechnya, Republic of Tatarstan, Moscow City, Perm, Nizhny Novgorod, and Orenburg Oblasts in late June and early July.[4] Tyumen Oblast officials announced the formation of volunteer units (not specifically a battalion) on July 7.[5]

Volunteer battalions could generate around 34,000 new servicemen by the end of August if each federal subject produces at least one military unit of 400 men. Some Russian reports and documentation suggest that the Kremlin seeks to recruit an estimated 400 soldiers per battalion, who will receive a month of training before deploying to Ukraine.[6] The number of men may vary as some federal subjects such as Republic of Tatarstan and Chechnya are establishing two and four volunteer battalions, respectively.[7] It is possible that some federal subjects may delay or not participate in the establishment of the battalions, with officials in Volgograd reportedly remaining silent on the formation of the new units.[8] Newly formed battalions are currently departing to training grounds and will likely complete their month-long training by end of August but they will not be combat ready in such a short time period.[9] **Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian military on July 12 for sourcing Iranian UAVs to improve artillery targeting in Ukraine while failing to address the command issues that more severely limit the effectiveness of Russian artillery.** Russian Telegram channel Rybar claimed on July 12 that Russian requests and approval for artillery fire pass through a convoluted chain of command, resulting in a delay of several hours to several days between Russian ground forces requesting artillery fire, Russian targeting, and conducting the actual strikes.[10] Rybar claimed that Russian forces in Syria reduced the time between targeting and striking to under an hour.[11] Rybar claimed that while the Russian need for more UAVs is clear and that Iranian UAVs helped achieve a target-to-fire time of 40 minutes in Syrian training grounds additional UAVs do not solve the problems of overcentralized Russian command and overreliance on artillery in Ukraine.[12] Russian milblogger *Voyennyi Osvedomitel’* claimed that Russian forces had faced the same overcentralized command during the First Chechen War, wherein the inability of Russian ground forces to request artillery support without going through a chain of command inhibited responses to enemy offensive actions.[13] Milblogger *Yuzhnyi Veter* claimed that Ukrainian artillery forces’ target-to-response time is under 40 seconds.[14]

The Critical Threats Project at AEI has updated its datasheet on Iranian UAVs with additional information, including information on the kinds of munitions those UAVs can reportedly launch.
Key Takeaways

- The Kremlin likely ordered Russian “federal subjects” (regions) to form volunteer battalions to deploy to Ukraine.
- Russian forces conducted failed ground assaults north of Slovyansk and around Bakhmut.
- Russian forces continued air and artillery strikes around Siversk and west of Donetsk City.
- Russian forces continued targeting Ukrainian rail lines on the Eastern Axis.
- Russian forces attempted limited and unsuccessful ground assaults north of Kharkiv City.
- Russian forces prioritized defensive operations on the Southern Axis as Ukrainian forces continued targeting ammunition depots.
- Russian occupation authorities are increasing financial incentives for civilians working in occupied Ukraine.
- Russian occupation authorities may be setting conditions to forcibly relocate Ukrainian children in occupied territories to Crimea.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 13, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 12

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, George Barros, Layne Philipson, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 12, 8:10 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

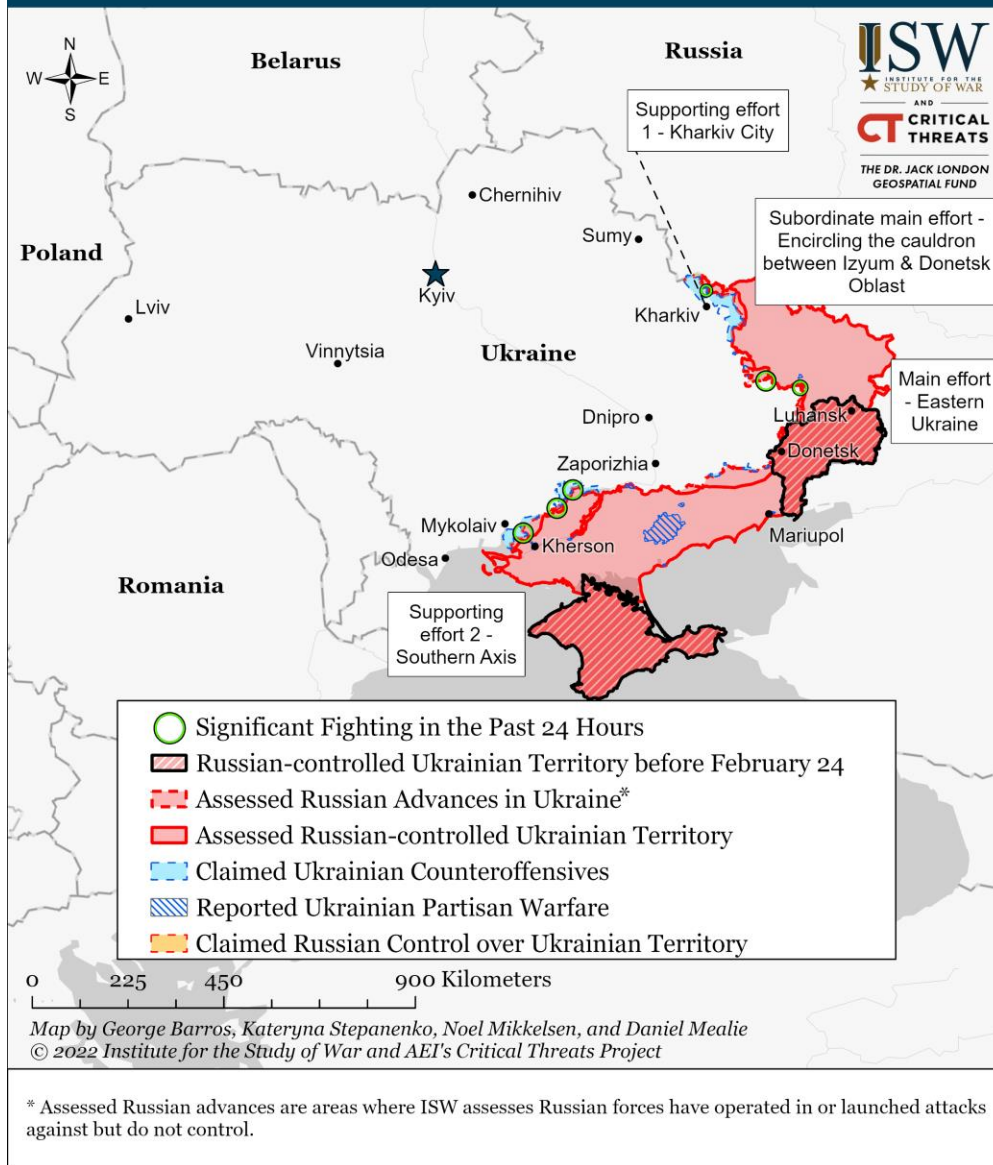
Russian forces remain in a theater-wide operational pause in Ukraine. Russian forces continue to regroup, rest, refit, and reconstitute; bombard critical areas to set conditions for future ground offensives; and conduct limited probing attacks. The Russian Ministry of Defense did not claim any new territorial control on July 12.[1] ISW has previously noted that an operational pause does not mean a cessation of attacks.[2] Current Russian offensive actions are likely meant to prepare for future offensives, the timing of which remains unclear.

White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan reported on July 11 that Iran will provide Russia with “up to several hundred UAVs” on an expedited timeline.[3] Sullivan did not specify the kinds of drones Iran will be supplying. [AEI's Critical Threats Project has provided a quick summary of the basic kinds and capabilities of Iranian drones.](#) Sullivan noted that Iran will also provide weapons-capable UAVs and train Russian forces to use Iranian drones as early as July. Russian milbloggers and war correspondents have long criticized the Kremlin for ineffective aerial reconnaissance and artillery fire correction measures due to the lack of UAVs. Former Russian military commander and milblogger Igor Girkin stated that Ukrainian forces have successfully defended the Donetsk Oblast frontline due to the advantage of Ukrainian UAV capabilities in the area.[4] Russian milblogger Andrey Morozov (also known as Boytsevoi Kot Murz) blamed Russian state media for grossly misrepresenting the availability of Russian UAVs and their ability to support accurate artillery fire.[5] Russian frontline correspondent Alexander Sladkov also complained that Russian forces can build more drones but have not done so.[6]

Key Takeaways

- **The Kremlin is reportedly sourcing Iranian UAVs likely to improve Russian aerial reconnaissance and indirect fire accuracy in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited and unsuccessful ground assaults north of Slovyansk and east of Siversk.**
- **Russian forces continued air and artillery strikes around Bakhmut and Avdiivka.**
- **Russian forces conducted multiple unsuccessful ground assaults north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces likely conducted a false-flag attack on the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in occupied Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia Oblast.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian strikes killed multiple Russian officers in Kherson City on July 10.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian ammunition depots on the Southern Axis.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 12, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 11

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 11, 7:10 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is likely continuing to grant Russian forces access to Belarusian airspace to demonstrate at least nominal support to Russian President Vladimir Putin without risking direct military involvement of Belarusian Armed Forces in operations in

Ukraine. Deputy Chief of the Main Operational Department of the Ukrainian General Staff Oleksiy Gromov previously reported on July 7 that the Belarusian government transferred use of the Pribytki airfield in Gomel Oblast to Russia.[1] Independent Belarusian monitoring organization The Hajun Project similarly reported on July 11 that a Russian Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft flew into Belarusian airspace for the first time since April 4.[2] The Hajun Project noted that the Belarusian government introduced new airspace restrictions along the border with Ukraine where the AWACS aircraft patrolled between July 10 and 11.[3] Taken together, these data points likely indicate that Lukashenko is attempting to provide support to Putin's war in Ukraine short of direct Belarusian military intervention in an effort to respond to the pressure Putin is likely putting on him. As ISW has previously assessed, the likelihood of direct Belarusian involvement in the war in Ukraine remains low due to the effect that might have on the stability and even survival of Lukashenko's regime.[4]

Key Takeaways

- **Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is likely continuing to allow Russia access to Belarusian airspace to indicate support to Russian President Vladimir Putin without risking the consequences of direct Belarusian military involvement in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited and unsuccessful ground assaults northwest of Slovyansk and west of Donetsk City.**
- **Russian forces continued air and artillery strikes around Siversk and Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces conducted localized ground assaults northwest of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces continued to focus on defensive operations along the entire Southern Axis.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 11, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 10

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 10, 8:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces are in the midst of a theater-wide operational pause in Ukraine. This operational pause has been largely characterized by Russian troops regrouping to rest, refit, and reconstitute; heavy artillery fire in critical areas to set conditions for future ground advances; and limited probing attacks to identify Ukrainian weakness and structure appropriate tactical responses. As ISW has previously noted, an operational pause does not mean a complete cessation of hostilities, rather that ongoing hostilities are more preparative in nature.[1]

Russian milblogger Rybar provided more evidence of tensions between the Russian military command and Russian war correspondents.[2] Russian war correspondents include journalists operating at the frontlines and Russian milbloggers commenting on information available in the open-source (and likely also drawn from friends in the military). Rybar noted that Russian military commanders responsible for wartime information operations are attempting to silence Russian milbloggers and war correspondents to conceal the Russian military's blunders during the invasion of Ukraine. Rybar noted that Russian military commanders remain shaped by negative experiences during the Chechnya wars when war correspondents exposed problems at the frontline to the Kremlin and embarrassed Russian officers.

Rybar stated that the Russian Defense Ministry and possibly actors within the presidential administration are actively attempting to silence unofficial coverage of the Russian war in Ukraine. Rybar expressed support for a Telegram article by Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Deputy Information Minister (and milblogger) Daniil Bezsonov that criticized the Kremlin's apparent effort to promote self-censorship among war correspondents.[3] Rybar noted that Adviser to the Russian Defense Minister Andrey Ilnitsky called for such self-censorship on May 26 and had encouraged Russian war correspondents to report on the war only from an ideological standpoint without getting into operational details.[4] Rybar speculated that the presidential administration or other Russian officials ordered Ilnitsky to promote censorship among war correspondents who publish frontline updates in real-time.[5]

Rybar noted that the relationship between the Russian military command and war correspondents particularly soured after Russian President Vladimir Putin met with war correspondents during the St. Petersburg Economic Forum on June 17. Rybar claimed that two prominent war correspondents told Putin about the "mess" at the frontlines during the closed-door meeting, effectively bypassing the Russian Defense Ministry in presenting their negative views directly to the commander in chief. The event Rybar is describing likely occurred: Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov announced on June 12 that Putin would hold a largely closed-door meeting with Russian war correspondents, and Russian propagandist Margarita Simonyan confirmed that Putin had a "candid" and long conversation with frontline journalists after the event.[6] Rybar noted that Russian Defense Ministry began to identify war correspondents as a "threat" after this engagement whereas previously it had perceived them as a "poorly controlled problem."

Putin likely held the June 17 meeting to defuse milblogger discontent, which had become evident and dramatic after the disastrous failed river crossing attempt at Bilohorivka in mid-May. If that was his aim, he failed to win them over, as the milbloggers have remained staunchly critical of the way the Russian high command is waging the war ever since. But Putin may also have obtained a more unvarnished view of what is occurring on the frontlines than he was getting from the chain of command.

The Russian information space would change significantly if the Ministry of Defense cracked down on the milbloggers and stopped them from operational reporting. ISW uses milbloggers and Russian war correspondents as sources of Russian claims on a daily basis, so the elimination of regular milblogger operational reporting would affect ISW's approach to coverage. **We will continue to observe and report on milblogger and war correspondent behavior and will flag significant changes in the Russian information space as we observe them.**

Russian milbloggers are increasingly criticizing Russian strategy and military leadership by seizing upon recent successful Ukrainian strikes against Russian rear areas.[7] Russian milblogger *Voennyi Osvedomitel'* underlined the threat posed by Western-provided high mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) and stated that HIMARS will complicate Russian logistics in a Telegram post on July 9.[8] *Voennyi Osvedomitel'* cautioned that Russian air defense may be increasingly insufficient against Ukrainian strikes and called on Russian forces to improve coordination between intelligence and aviation in order to identify and target Western-provided weapons systems. Another milblogger with a small following, *Nam Pishut iz Yaniny*, complained that Russian military leadership is proving unable to defend against Western weapons being used against Russian positions.[9] Igor Girkin, a Russian nationalist who previously commanded militants during operations in Donbas in 2014, discussed recent

Ukrainian strikes against Russian rear areas and criticized Russian troops for not targeting Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) along which HIMARS and other Western weapons are delivered.^[10] Girkin suggested that the ongoing operational pause is exposing easily-exploitable Russian vulnerabilities and called for Russian troops to start fighting in full force again. Girkin and other milbloggers are likely to continue voicing their discontent with Russian military leadership as Ukrainian capabilities are strengthened by Western weaponry and equipment.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are conducting a theater-wide operational pause in Ukraine and engaging in operations to set conditions for future offensives.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited probing operations northwest of Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces are likely intensifying artillery and missile strikes west of Bakhmut in order to isolate the city from critical ground lines of communication (GLOCs).**
- **Russian forces conducted a limited and unsuccessful ground attack north of Donetsk City.**
- **Russian military leadership continues to form ad hoc volunteer units and private military company combat organizations partly comprised of older men and criminals to support operations in Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 10, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 9

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan
July 9, 6:15 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian-backed occupation authorities in Kharkiv Oblast stated that Kharkiv Oblast is an “inalienable part of Russian land,” indicating that the Kremlin likely intends to annex part or all of Kharkiv Oblast.[1] The Russian occupation government in Kharkiv Oblast unveiled a new flag for the

occupation regime in Kharkiv Oblast containing the Russian imperial double-headed eagle and symbols from the 18th century Kharkiv coat of arms.[2] The Russian occupation government stated that the imagery in the flag is a “symbol of the historical roots of Kharkiv Oblast as an inalienable part of Russian land,” indicating that the Kremlin seeks to annex portions of Kharkiv Oblast to Russia and likely seeks to capture all of Kharkiv Oblast if it can.[3] The Kharkiv Oblast occupation government’s speed in establishing a civilian administration on July 6 and introducing martial law in occupied Kharkiv Oblast on July 8 further indicates that the Kremlin is aggressively pursuing the legitimization and consolidation of the Kharkiv Oblast occupation administration’s power to support this broader territorial aim.[4] The Kharkiv Oblast occupation government’s explicit use of Imperial Russian imagery and rhetoric pointing clearly at annexation, rather than using imagery and rhetoric supporting the establishment of a “people’s republic,” reinforces ISW’s prior assessment that the Kremlin has broader territorial aims than capturing Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts or even holding southern Ukraine.[5]

The Kremlin has likely used a leaked letter from mothers demanding the ban of journalist activity on the frontlines to promote self-censorship among pro-Russian milbloggers and war correspondents.

Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* released a letter from mothers of an Astrakhan-based platoon that blamed Kremlin-sponsored *Izvestia* war correspondent Valentin Trushnin for reporting the details of Russian positions in a way that led to the deaths of their sons.[6] *Meduza* removed the letter from its website on July 8. First Deputy of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Information Minister and milblogger Daniil Bezsonov reported noticing suggestions from unspecified “faceless experts” to censor his posts regarding Russian war efforts.[7] Bezsonov noted that Russian war correspondents received necessary accreditations from the Kremlin and follow protocol when reporting from the frontline to refrain from exposing Russian positions. Bezsonov also argued that Russian war correspondents took the initiative to keep Russians updated on the situation on the front line from the first days of the war, while Russian “big bosses” failed to launch an information campaign to counter claimed Ukrainian information warfare. Several Russian milbloggers shared Bezsonov’s remarks, with proxy serviceman Maksim Fomin stating that Russian Defense Ministry briefings are not sufficient to replace combat footage.[8]

The Kremlin faces challenges directly censoring pro-Russian milbloggers and war correspondents but will likely continue to look for opportunities to promote self-censorship.

Moscow has not demonstrated the ability to compel Telegram to delete or control the content of channels, and so would likely have to threaten individual milbloggers with legal or extra-legal action to stop them from publishing on that platform. Russia could prevent war correspondents publishing in regular media outlets from writing stories or deprive them of access to the front lines. But both the milbloggers and the war correspondents are explicitly pro-war and patriotic, often ultra-nationalist, with large followings likely concentrated among Russian President Vladimir Putin’s key supporters. Threatening or suppressing them directly could backfire if Putin’s motivation in doing so is to stop them from undermining support for the war or questioning authority. Actions such as the use of this leaked and possibly faked letter to stoke self-censorship or induce pressure from the readers of these blogs and articles toward self-censorship may be an effort to achieve the Kremlin’s desired effects without the risk of having them backfire.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to launch unsuccessful assaults northwest of Slovyansk and conducted offensive operations east of Siversk from the Lysychansk area.**
- **Russian forces continued localized attacks northwest of Kharkiv City, likely in an effort to defend Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in the area.**
- **Russian forces continue to face personnel and equipment shortages, relying on old armored personnel carriers and launching new recruitment campaigns.**
- **Russian forces continued to set conditions for the annexation of Donbas, Kharkiv Oblast, and southern Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 9, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 8 [Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Frederick W. Kagan, and George Barros
July 8, 7:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai stated that Russian forces are not conducting an operational pause as of July 8 and are continuing to shell settlements and deploy additional

tank units to Donbas.[1] Haidai's statement likely reflects confusion about the meaning of the expression "operational pause" and how such a "pause" actually manifests on the ground in a war. US military doctrine considers the role of operational pauses in warfighting and campaigning in some detail.[2] It notes that "Normally, operational pauses are planned to regenerate combat power or augment sustainment and forces for the next phase." It observes that "The primary drawback to operational pauses is the risk of forfeiting strategic or operational initiative." It therefore recommends that "If pauses are necessary, the [commander] can alternate pauses among components to ensure continuous pressure on the enemy or adversary through offensive actions by some components while other components pause." Soviet military theory regarded operational pauses in a similar fashion—sometimes necessary, but always dangerous.

The Russian military command, which announced an operational pause on July 7, has apparently recognized the need for a pause given the state of Russian forces at this point in the campaign. The Russian troops that have completed the seizure of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk are clearly in need of regenerating combat power and building up supporting capabilities, including supply, before launching another large-scale offensive operation. Numerous reports from various sources show that they are engaged in both activities. They have naturally and necessarily ceased efforts to conduct large-scale offensive operations in this sector while they reorganized, reinforce, and resupply their tired troops—in other words, they are in an operational pause in this sector.

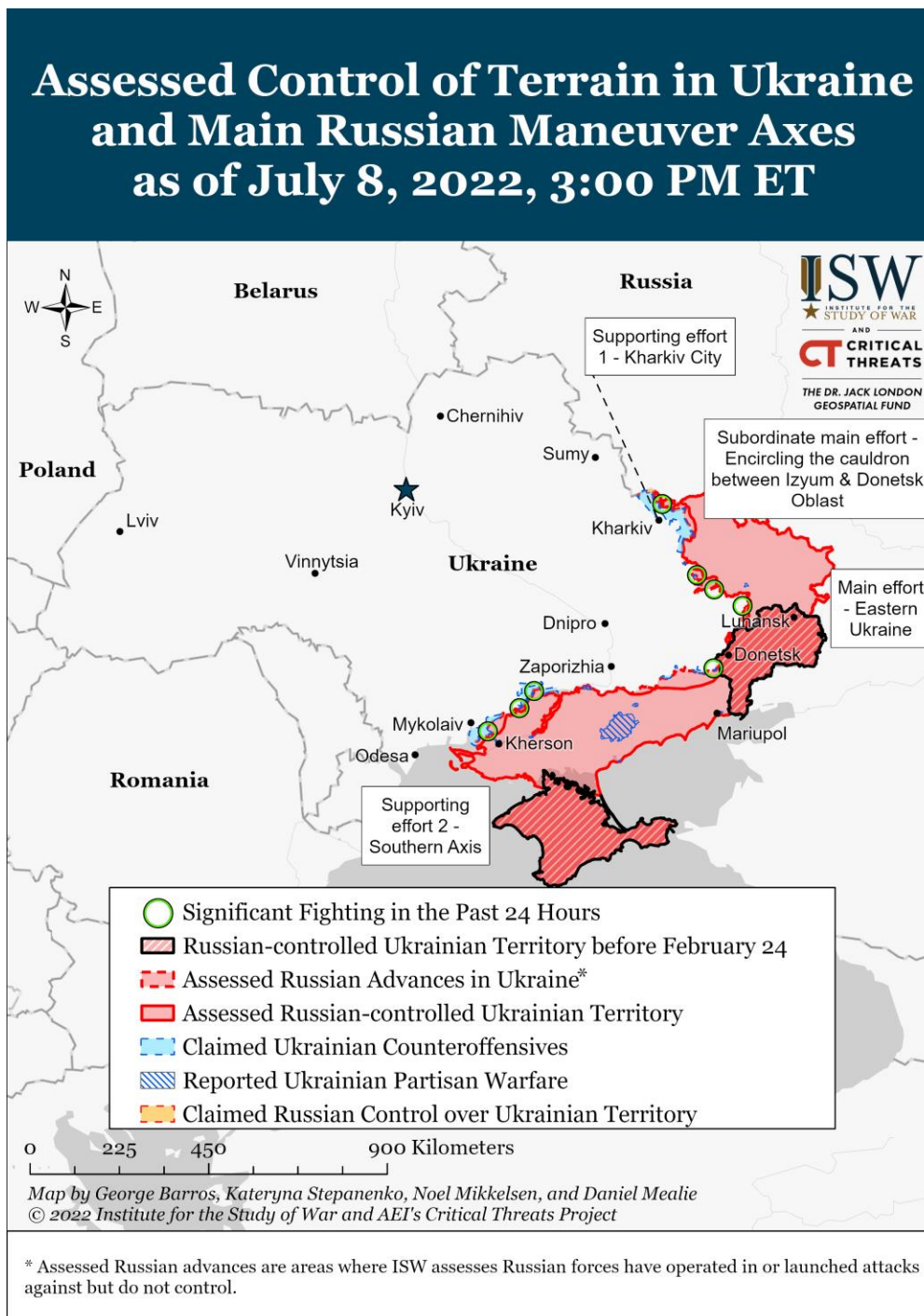
Recognizing the danger of allowing the Ukrainians to seize the initiative and go over to an offensive of their own, however, Russian forces continue to conduct more-limited offensive operations in this sector and elsewhere along the front line. Those operations involve smaller Russian forces than had been involved in the attacks on Severodonetsk and Lysychansk pursuing more limited and localized objectives with less determination and willingness to take casualties compared with their behavior during the fights for the two cities. When the Russian military command has determined that it has adequately prepared for a renewed major offensive operation, it will likely resume larger-scale ground offensives with more troops and a greater determination than it is currently showing. The transition out of the operational pause may be gradual and difficult to discern at once, just as the transition into it appeared gradual. Skillful campaign design aims to achieve precisely such an effect in order to persuade the enemy that no pause is contemplated or underway, or that it will be too short to be of benefit to the enemy, and thereby convince the enemy that it does not have the opportunity to seize the initiative and go over to a counter-offensive of its own. Russian campaign design, inadequate as it has generally been, is nevertheless good enough to manifest this basic principle of operational art.

Russian milbloggers are continuing to show rhetorical opposition to the Kremlin by faulting the Russian Defense Ministry for making Russian logistics vulnerable to the Ukrainian strikes via US-provided HIMARS rocket systems. Russian milbloggers are notably criticizing the Russian military command instead of expressing patriotic hatred toward Western suppliers of HIMARS as one would have expected of the ultra-nationalist, pro-war Telegram channels. Former Russian military commander Igor Girkin, an outspoken Russian nationalist who commanded militants during the Donbas war in 2014, stated that personnel of the Russian Defense Ministry's logistics department should be tried for failing to disperse and camouflage ammunition depots.[3] Russian milbloggers *Starshe Eddy* and Russian officer Aleksey Suronkin echoed similar concerns over the effectiveness of HIMARS, calling on Russian forces to adapt to new threats and strike back against Ukrainian forces.[4] The continued trend of patriotic and pro-war Russian milbloggers blaming the Kremlin by default for setbacks and problems in the war may begin to create in effect a loyal opposition that could ultimately erode confidence in the milbloggers' significant audience in Russia's ability to win.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to conduct limited offensive operations north of Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces continued attempting to advance toward Siversk from Lysychansk but did not make any confirmed territorial gains.**
- **Russian forces launched assaults on Dementiivka to disrupt Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) along the T2117 highway.**

- Russian forces continued to launch assaults on settlements along the Kherson-Mykolaiv and Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border to regain lost positions.
- Russian Federation Council approved a bill committing the Kremlin to paying veteran benefits to civilians involved in the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- Russian occupation authorities continued to set conditions for the annexation of Donbas and southern Ukraine.



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 7

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 7, 5:45 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian Defense Ministry Spokesperson Igor Konashenkov announced on July 7 that Russian forces in Ukraine are pausing to rest and regain their combat capabilities, confirming ISW's assessment that Russian forces have initiated an operational pause.^[1] Konashenkov did not specify the intended length of Russian forces' operational pause. As ISW previously assessed, Russian forces have not ceased active hostilities during this operational pause and are unlikely to do so.^[2] Russian forces still conducted limited ground offensives and air, artillery, and missile strikes across all axes on July 7.^[3] Russian forces will likely continue to confine themselves to small-scale offensive actions as they rebuild forces and set conditions for a more significant offensive in the coming weeks or months.

Key Takeaways

- The Russian Ministry of Defense announced that Russian forces are conducting an operational pause to rest and reconstitute.
- Russian forces continued efforts to advance toward Slovyansk from the southeast of Izyum and may be setting conditions to advance from the southeast of Barvinkove—either toward Slovyansk or toward Kramatorsk.
- Russian forces made marginal gains to the southeast of Siversk and continued offensive operations west of the Lysychansk area.
- Russian forces continued offensive operations to the south and east of Bakhmut.
- Russian forces conducted a limited and unsuccessful attack north of Kharkiv City.
- Ukrainian partisans are likely continuing to target Russian-controlled railways around Melitopol.
- Russian oblasts are continuing to create their own ad hoc volunteer units to compensate for personnel losses in Ukraine.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 7, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 6

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, George Barros, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 6, 6:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

There were no claimed or assessed Russian territorial gains in Ukraine on July 6 for the first time in 133 days of war, supporting ISW's assessment that Russian forces have largely initiated an operational pause.^[1] The Russian Defense Ministry claimed territorial gains every day from the start of the war but has not claimed any new territory or ground force movements since completing the encirclement of Lysychansk on July 3.^[2] However, Russian forces still conducted limited and unsuccessful ground assaults across all axes on July 6.^[3] Such attempts are consistent with a Russian operational pause, which does not imply or require the complete cessation of active hostilities. It means, in this case, that Russian forces will likely confine themselves to relatively small-scale offensive actions as they attempt to set conditions for more significant offensive operations and rebuild the combat power needed to attempt those more ambitious undertakings.

The Kremlin continued to set conditions for the crypto-mobilization of the Russian economy in anticipation of protracted operations in Ukraine. The Russian State Duma adopted the third and final reading of a law introduced by the cabinet of ministers on June 30 that will allow the Russian government to oversee and regulate labor relations in Russian enterprises (both state and privately-owned).^[4] This law, as ISW has previously reported, will allow government officials to recall workers from personal vacations, reschedule time off without employee consent, and require employees to work weekends, holidays, and nights. These measures allow the Kremlin to take much more direct control of most aspects of the Russian economy, including suspending rights and protections some workers would normally have.^[5] The law must still be sent to the Federation Council before it reaches Russian President Vladimir Putin and is officially published, but the Kremlin is likely seeking to use the law to leverage domestic labor to maximize economic output and prepare for protracted operations in Ukraine.^[6] Russia's largest lead production plant reportedly stopped production on July 6 due to the almost-total halt of Russian metallurgical exports, and the Kremlin will likely continue to take measures to codify economic mobilization to offset or mitigate the effects of sanctions and the war on essential industries.^[7]

Key Takeaways

- **The Russian Ministry of Defense has not claimed any territorial gains since July 3, supporting the assessment that Russian forces are conducting an operational pause while still engaging in limited ground attacks to set conditions for more significant offensive operations.**
- **The Kremlin continues to prepare for a protracted war by setting conditions for crypto-mobilization of the economy and largely initiating an operational pause in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations northwest and east of Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to push westward toward Siversk from the Luhansk-Donetsk oblast border.**
- **Russian forces continued attempts to advance toward Bakhmut from the south.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground assaults in northwestern Kherson Oblast.**
- **Ukrainian forces may be setting conditions for a counteroffensive toward Kherson City.**
- **Russian forces may be forming a new military unit in Mulino, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 6, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 5

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, George Barros, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 5, 7:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russia's stated objectives in its invasion of Ukraine remain regime change in Kyiv and the truncation of the sovereignty of any Ukrainian state that survives the Russian attack despite Russian military setbacks and rhetoric hinting at a reduction in war aims following those defeats. Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev stated on July 5 that the Russian military operation in Ukraine will continue until Russia achieves its goals of protecting civilians from "genocide," "denazifying" and demilitarizing Ukraine, and obliging Ukraine to be permanently neutral between Russia and NATO—almost exactly restating the goals Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in his February 24 speech justifying the war.[1] Putin had stated that the operation aimed to protect civilians from humiliation and genocide, demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, and prosecute genocidal perpetrators.[2] Patrushev's explicit restatement of Putin's initial objectives, nearly five months later, strongly indicates that the Kremlin does not consider recent Russian gains in Luhansk Oblast sufficient to accomplish the initial goals of the "special operation," supporting ISW's ongoing assessment that the Kremlin has significant territorial aspirations beyond the Donbas. Patrushev's statement suggests that Russian military leadership will continue to push for advances outside Donetsk and Luhansk blasts and that the Kremlin is preparing for a protracted war with the intention of taking much larger portions of Ukraine.[3]

Patrushev's statement is noteworthy because of its timing and his position as a close confidante of Putin. Patrushev is very unlikely to stray far from Putin's position in his public comments given his relationship with Putin and his role in the Kremlin. His restatement of virtually the same maximalist objectives that Putin laid out before the invasion even as Russian forces seemed to be closing in on the more limited objectives of securing Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts—which Putin and other Russian leaders had hinted were their new aims following their defeats around Kyiv—strongly suggests that those hints did not reflect any actual change in Kremlin policy. Patrushev's statement significantly increases the burden on those who suggest that some compromise ceasefire or even peace based on limited additional Russian territorial gains is possible, even if it were acceptable to Ukraine or desirable for the West (neither of which is the case).

Igor Girkin, a Russian nationalist and former commander of militants in the 2014 war in Donbas, responded to Patrushev's statements and continued expressing his general disillusionment with the Kremlin's official line on operations in Ukraine. Girkin said that the intended goals of "denazification" and "de-militarization" will only be possible with the total defeat of the Ukrainian military and the surrender of the Ukrainian government.[4] Girkin noted that Russian victory is premised on the capture of "Novorossiia"—a notional territory that encompasses eight Ukrainian oblasts, including the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and much of eastern and southern Ukraine. Girkin also claimed that the capture of "Novorossiia" is the bare minimum and that Russian goals will be realized through the total capture of "Malorossiia," which is an invocation of the Russian imperial concept for almost all Ukrainian territory. Girkin is once again pushing back on the Kremlin line, which he views as insufficient in securing Russian objectives in Ukraine. Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Ambassador to Russia Rodion Miroshnik similarly suggested that the Kremlin has not yet met its goals in Ukraine, despite reaching the borders of his claimed oblast, and stated that LNR authorities are still not confident in the security of the LNR.[5] Girkin and Miroshnik's statements, taken together, indicate that Russian nationalists continue to push for further territorial gains and, at least in Girkin's case, full-scale regime change and the incorporation of most of Ukraine into Russia. Patrushev's statement suggests that Kremlin thinking may not be that far removed from these extremist nationalist ambitions.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev restated Russian President Vladimir Putin's initial objectives for operations in Ukraine, suggesting that the Kremlin retains maximalist objectives including regime change and territorial expansion far beyond the Donbas.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations northwest and east of Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces are attempting to advance west of the Lysychansk area toward Siversk.**
- **Russian forces are likely attempting to gain access to village roads southeast of Bakhmut in order to advance on the city from the south.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted a limited counterattack southwest of Donetsk City.**

- Russian forces continued limited and unsuccessful assaults in northern Kharkiv Oblast.
- Russian authorities are conducting escalated conscription measures in occupied territories to compensate for continuing manpower losses.
- Russian authorities are continuing to consolidate administrative control of occupied areas of Ukraine, likely to set conditions for the direct annexation of these territories to the Russian Federation.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 5, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 4

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, George Barros, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 4, 7:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian President Vladimir Putin celebrated the Russian seizure of Lysychansk and the Luhansk Oblast border and appeared to direct the Russian military to conduct an operational pause. Putin met with Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu on July 4 to discuss recent Russian gains in Luhansk Oblast and presented Colonel General Alexander Lapin and Major General Esedulla Abachev with the “Hero of Russia” award for their leadership during the Lysychansk operation.^[1] Putin and Shoigu presented the capture of Lysychansk and Luhansk Oblast as a major victory for Russian forces in Ukraine. Putin also stated that the Russian units that participated in the battle for Lysychansk should rest to increase their combat capabilities.^[2] Putin’s public comment was likely meant to signal his concern for the welfare of his troops in the face of periodic complaints in Russia about the treatment of Russian soldiers. His comment was also likely accurate—Russian troops that fought through Severodonetsk and Lysychansk very likely do need a significant period in which to rest and refit before resuming large-scale offensive operations. It is not clear, however, that the Russian military will accept the risks of a long enough operational pause to allow these likely exhausted forces to regain their strength.

Former Russian military commander Igor Girkin, an ardent Russian nationalist who commanded militants during the 2014 war in Donbas, posted a scathing critique of the Kremlin’s handling of the war on his Telegram channel and questioned the significance of the seizure of Lysychansk. He suggested that Russian forces had paid too high a price for a limited gain. In a series of Telegram posts published prior to Putin’s meeting with Shoigu on July 4, Girkin complained that Russian forces have failed to meet the announced goals of the “second stage of the special operation” (the operations in eastern Ukraine following Russia’s retreat from Kyiv) to his nearly 400,000 subscribers.^[3] Girkin noted that the Ukrainian defense of Lysychansk was deliberately designed to inflict maximum damage on Russian troops and burn through Russian manpower and equipment. He strongly suggested that accepting battle on the Ukrainians’ terms was a significant misstep by the Russian leadership.^[4] Girkin stated (before Putin’s remarks were made public) that Russian troops need time to rest and replenish in order to recover their offensive potential and noted that the lack of individual soldier replacements and unit rotations is severely degrading morale. He warned, however, that taking time to reconstitute offensive capability would allow Ukrainian troops to seize the initiative and further threaten Russian gains.^[5] Girkin additionally claimed that Russian forces have limited prospects of advancing elsewhere in Ukraine due to Ukrainian personnel and equipment superiority.^[6]

Girkin’s critique is a noteworthy example of the way Russian milbloggers and military enthusiasts have become disillusioned with the Kremlin’s handling and execution of operations in Ukraine, particularly after the dramatic failed river crossing attempt at Bilohorivka in early May.^[7] Girkin’s statements directly undermine the Kremlin’s efforts to frame Lysychansk as a significant victory or turning point and show that the disillusionment amongst ultra-nationalist elements in the Russian information space continues to run deep. Girkin’s assessment of Russian military failures notably aligns with much of ISW’s (and other Western agencies’ and experts’) analysis, suggesting that he and some other milbloggers continue to make and publish assessments of the situation and forecasts independent of the Kremlin line. Girkin likely hopes to use his status as a prominent former participant in the war in Donbas in 2014 to persuade Putin to take certain measures to secure Russian success in a war that Girkin still thinks is justified and necessary—specifically mobilizing the Russian population for war on a much larger scale.^[8] Girkin, along with other members of the Russian nationalist milblogger space, will likely continue to offer critiques of the Kremlin’s line on operations in Ukraine to advocate for general mobilization and more competent Russian military leadership.

Ukrainian forces are increasingly targeting Russian military infrastructure with indirect fire and US-provided HIMARS systems deep in occupied territory. Ukrainian forces reportedly struck Russian ammunition depots in Dibrivne, Kharkiv Oblast, (close to the frontline) on July 4 and Snizhne, Donetsk Oblast, (approximately 75 km from the frontlines) overnight on July 3-4 following a strike on one of four Russian ammunition depots in Melitopol on July 3.[9] The Ukrainian General Staff also published a video on July 4 of a Ukrainian HIMARS (high mobility artillery rocket system) operating in an unspecified area of Zaporizhia Oblast.[10] The increased ability of Ukrainian forces to target critical Russian military facilities with Western-provided HIMARS demonstrates how Western military aid provides Ukraine with new and necessary military capabilities.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian leadership may be setting conditions for an operational pause following the seizure of Lysychansk and the Luhansk Oblast boundary.**
- **Russian forces are consolidating territorial and administrative control over Severodonetsk and Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations to the east of Bakhmut to prepare for advances on Bakhmut and Siversk.**
- **Russian forces continued limited and unsuccessful assaults north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Ukrainian partisan activity is targeting Russian railway lines around Melitopol and Tokmak.**
- **Russian leadership may be setting conditions for the conscription of Ukrainian citizens living in occupied territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 3

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, George Barros, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 3, 7:45 pm ET

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Russian forces have likely secured the Luhansk Oblast border, although pockets of Ukrainian resistance may remain in and around Lysychansk. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced that Russian forces have captured Luhansk Oblast on July 3, after seizing Lysychansk and settlements on the Luhansk Oblast administrative border.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff also announced that Ukrainian forces withdrew from Lysychansk to avoid personnel losses.[2] Russian forces have likely not fully cleared Lysychansk and Luhansk Oblast as of July 3, despite Shoigu's announcement. The Russian Defense Ministry stated that Russian forces are still fighting within Lysychansk to defeat remaining encircled Ukrainian forces, but the Ukrainian withdrawal means that Russian forces will almost certainly complete their clearing operations relatively quickly.[3] Russian forces will likely next advance on Siversk, though they could launch more significant attacks on Bakhmut or Slovyansk instead or at the same time. Ukrainian forces will likely continue their fighting withdrawal toward the E40 highway that runs from Slovyansk through Bakhmut toward Debaltseve. It is unclear whether they will choose to defend around Siversk at this time.

Two very senior Russian commanders are reportedly responsible for the tactical activities around Lysychansk. Commander of the Central Military District Colonel General Aleksandr Lapin and Commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces Army General Sergey Suvorikin (who also commands Russia's "southern" group of troops in Ukraine) have been responsible for securing Lysychansk and the area to the west of it respectively.[4] The involvement of two such senior officers in the same undertaking in a small part of the front is remarkable and likely indicates the significance that Russian President Vladimir Putin has attributed to securing Lysychansk and the Luhansk Oblast border as well as his lack of confidence in more junior officers to do the job.

Ukrainian forces likely used US-provided HIMARS rocket artillery systems to strike a Russian ammunition depot at the Melitopol airfield on July 3. Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov reported that Ukrainian forces launched two strikes on one of the four Russian depots in Melitopol.[5] Russian Telegram channel Rybar released footage of a large cloud of smoke over the city, and Russian-appointed Melitopol Governor Yevhen Balytskyi falsely claimed that Ukrainian forces aimed to strike residential buildings, but instead hit areas around the airfield.[6]

The Kremlin likely seeks to expand Russian state control over private Russian companies that support elements of Russia's military industrial base. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on July 3 that the Russian government's inability to pay Russian firms supporting Russia's war in Ukraine is degrading Russia's ability to repair damaged vehicles. The GUR reported that the directors of Russian military vehicle repair centers are not accepting new Russian equipment for repair because the Russian military has not paid these centers for previous work.[7] Recently proposed Russian legislation suggests that Kremlin leadership shares GUR's assessment. Russian legislators in the Russian State Duma submitted a bill on June 30 that would empower the Kremlin to introduce "special measures in the economic sphere" enabling the Russian government to force private Russian companies to provide supplies for Russian military operations.[8] The bill prohibits Russian businesses from refusing to fulfil Russian government procurement orders connected to Russian military operations.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces seized the remaining territory between Lysychansk and Luhansk Oblast's administrative borders on July 3.**
- **Russian forces launched assaults northeast of Bakhmut and north of Slovyansk but did not secure new territorial gains.**
- **Russian forces conducted extensive artillery attacks in the western part of the Southern Axis likely to disrupt Ukrainian counteroffensives.**
- **The Kremlin continued to set conditions for potential Russian annexation of proxy republics.**
- **Ukrainian partisans reportedly derailed a Russian armored train carrying ammunition near Melitopol on July 2.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 3, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 2

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Frederick W. Kagan, and George Barros

July 2, 6:45 pm ET

Ukrainian forces likely conducted a deliberate withdrawal from Lysychansk, resulting in the Russian seizure of the city on July 2. Geolocated footage showed Russian forces casually walking around northern and southeastern neighborhoods in Lysychansk in a way that suggests that there are few or no remaining Ukrainian forces in the city as of July 2.[1] Ukrainian military officials did not publicly

announce a troop withdrawal but neither did they report on defensive battles around Lysychansk. Ukrainian Internal Affairs Minister Vadym Denysenko vaguely noted that Russian forces have a “high probability” of capturing Lysychansk but that they will have a difficult time advancing in Donetsk Oblast past Slovyansk and Kramatorsk.[2] Ukrainian National Guard Spokesperson Ruslan Muzychuk rejected reports of Russian forces seizing and encircling Lysychansk, but these denials are likely outdated or erroneous.[3] The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Ambassador to Russia, Rodion Miroshnik, had previously claimed that Ukrainian forces began withdrawing from Lysychansk on June 28.[4] ISW will continue to monitor the situation.

Russian forces will likely establish control over the remaining territory of Luhansk Oblast in coming days and will likely then prioritize drives on Ukrainian positions in Siversk before turning to Slovyansk and Bakhmut. A Ukrainian withdrawal to Siversk would allow Ukrainian forces reduce the risk of immediate encirclement, but Ukrainian forces may continue a fighting withdrawal to a line near the E40 highway from Slovyansk to Bakhmut.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov inspected Russian troop groupings in Ukraine on July 2.[5] The Russian MoD posted a slideshow of images that reportedly prove that Gerasimov still holds his position as Chief of General Staff and that he had recently been in Ukraine, but notably did not include any video footage of Gerasimov’s purported inspection of Russian troops. This post was likely a response to recent speculation that Gerasimov had been removed from his post as part of the Kremlin’s purge of high-level Russian military leadership due to Russian failures in Ukraine. The Russian MoD amplified a claim that Ukrainian media has been lying about Gerasimov’s removal and stated that Gerasimov is still serving as the Chief of the General Staff.[6] The hasty presentation of a slideshow that does not clearly demonstrate that Gerasimov was recently performing his duties in Ukraine suggests that the Russian leadership is sensitive to rumors of a purge of senior Russian officers or possibly to the impression that the senior most officers are absent or uninvolved in the conflict. The Kremlin likely also seeks to retain or rebuild trust in Russian military leadership against the backdrop of major organizational restructuring, failures, and high casualties, as ISW has previously reported.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces entered Lysychansk and advanced within the city on July 2.**
- **Russian forces are conducting offensive operations southwest of Lysychansk likely to push westward towards Siversk and complete the capture of the entirety of Luhansk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces continued unsuccessful ground assaults north of Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited attacks southwest of Donetsk City but did not make any confirmed gains.**
- **Ukrainian troops are likely planning to threaten Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) throughout Kharkiv Oblast using Western-supplied weapons.**
- **Ukrainian counterattacks and partisan activity continue to force Russian troops to prioritize defensive operations along the Southern Axis.**
- **Proxy leadership may be setting conditions for the direct annexation of proxy republics by the Russian Federation.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 2, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 1

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Frederick W. Kagan, and George Barros

July 1, 6:45pm ET

The Kremlin is likely setting conditions for crypto-mobilization of the Russian economy in preparation for a protracted war in Ukraine. The Kremlin proposed an amendment to federal laws on Russian Armed Forces supply matters to the Russian State Duma on June 30, that would introduce “special measures in the economic sphere” obliging Russian businesses (regardless of ownership) to supply Russian special military and counterterrorist operations.[1] The amendment would prohibit

Russian businesses from refusing to accept state orders for special military operations and allow the Kremlin to change employee contracts and work conditions, such as forcing workers to work during the night or federal holidays. The Kremlin noted in the amendment's description that the ongoing special military operation in Ukraine exposed supply shortages, specifically materials needed to repair military equipment, and stated that Russian officials need to "concentrate their efforts in certain sectors of the economy." Russian President Vladimir Putin is likely mobilizing the Russian economy and industry to sustain the ongoing war effort, but has not yet taken parallel measures to mobilize Russian manpower on a large scale.

Russian authorities are likely taking measures to integrate the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) directly into the Russian energy system, contradicting previous Russian statements that the Zaporizhzhia NPP would sell electricity to Ukraine. Olga Kosharna, an independent expert on nuclear energy, stated on June 30 that Russia's Rosatom (Russian state-owned nuclear energy corporation) employees have been taking measures at the Zaporizhzhia NPP to potentially divert its energy to the Russian energy grid.[2] Kosharna added that Russian forces have been working in Chonhard (southern Kherson Oblast) to repair the main energy transmission line that runs into Crimea, which Ukrainian forces had destroyed in 2015 following Russia's seizure of the transmission line after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Representatives of Ukraine's Ukrenergo electricity transmission operator had stated as recently as late May that it would be physically impossible for Russia to divert Ukrainian electricity to Russia following the destruction of those transmission lines.[3] Russian forces are likely seeking to ensure physical access to transmission lines in order to support the direct flow of Ukrainian energy into Russia, which may explain some of the military activities observed in recent weeks in the Russian-occupied portions of Zaporizhia Oblast.

Russian authorities had indicated on May 18 that while the Zaporizhzhia NPP would work for Russia, it would continue to sell energy to Ukraine, as ISW reported.[4] However, it is becoming increasingly evident that Russian authorities are taking measures to integrate Ukrainian economic assets directly into the Russian economy. Reports that Russian forces may be preparing a false flag provocation at the Zaporizhzhia NPP could be part of this Russian effort--Moscow might use such a false flag attack to accuse Ukrainian authorities of mismanaging nuclear assets and justify taking full control of them and their output.[5]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued efforts to encircle Lysychansk and conducted offensive operations to the south and southwest of the city.**
- **Russian forces have likely not yet reached the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway on the ground but are denying Ukrainian forces use of it by continuing artillery and airstrikes against remaining Ukrainian positions along the road.**
- **Russian forces focused on regrouping and improving their tactical positions north of Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground assaults in northern Kharkiv Oblast and continued shelling Ukrainian positions north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces conducted artillery and missile strikes along the Southern Axis.**
- **Russian authorities continue efforts to expand the pool of recruits available to fight in Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 1, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 30

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Frederick W. Kagan, and Grace Mappes

June 30, 7:25pm ET

Russian forces retreated from the Snake Island on June 30 following a Ukrainian missile and artillery campaign. The Russian Defense Ministry spun the retreat as “a step of goodwill.”[1] The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that the Kremlin does not interfere with United Nations (UN) efforts to organize a humanitarian corridor for agricultural export from Ukraine but did not acknowledge the

Ukrainian artillery and missile campaign that had actually caused the retreat. The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command had announced elements of that campaign on June 21.[2] The Russian Defense Ministry has claimed that Russian forces defeated all Ukrainian drone and missile attacks leading up to their retreat despite considerable evidence to the contrary.[3] The Russian defeat on the Snake Island will alleviate some pressure off the Ukrainian coast by removing Russian air defense and anti-shipping missile systems from the island. The retreat itself will not end the sea blockade, however, as Russian forces have access to land-based anti-ship systems in Crimea and western Kherson Oblast that can still target Ukrainian cargo as well as the use of the remaining ships of the Black Sea Fleet.

Russian milbloggers overwhelmingly defended the Russian decision to withdraw troops and equipment from the island, claiming that Russian forces are prioritizing the “liberation of Donbas.”[4] Some said that Russian forces do not have enough capacity to destroy Ukrainian coastal troops and others claimed that Russian forces will be more successful striking Ukrainians when they attempt to deploy their own troops to the island. Milbloggers have previously criticized the Russian military command for failing to retreat to save equipment and manpower and are likely content with the Russian retreat from the Snake Island.[5] Milbloggers, following the Kremlin line, did not acknowledge the role Ukrainian strikes against the island played in compelling Russian forces to retreat.

Russian authorities continue to galvanize the support of proxy actors in order to support force generation efforts. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov announced on June 29 that another Akhmat special battalion, the Vostok (east)-Akhmat battalion, has been successfully formed and will shortly move to its point of permanent deployment and begin active service.[6] As ISW reported on June 28, Kadyrov stated he intends to form four new Akhmat special operations battalions and announced the formation of the Zapad (west)-Akhmat battalion early this week.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian troops made limited gains within the Lysychansk Oil Refinery and around Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations to the south and east of Bakhmut and to the north of Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to regain control of settlements north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Ukrainian counteroffensives continue to force Russian troops on the Southern Axis to prioritize defensive operations.**
- **Russian occupation authorities took measures to ensure further economic and financial integration of occupied areas into the Russian system.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 30, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 29

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Grace Mappes

June 29, 6 pm ET

The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on June 28 that the Kremlin is setting conditions to annex areas of Kherson and Zaporizhia into the Russian Federation under the template of the pre-1917 "Tavriia Gubernia." [1] The Tavriia (or Tauride) Gubernia was a historical province of the Russian

Empire.[2] Under the Tavriia Gubernia scenario, the left bank of Kherson Oblast and part of Zaporizhia Oblast would be directly annexed to the Russian Federation, likely as a single unit.[3] The Ukrainian Resistance Center stated that Russian authorities are preparing for a pseudo-referendum to set conditions for the annexation of the Tavriia Gubernia (as opposed to proxy “people’s republics”). The Russians are also requiring Ukrainian citizens in southern Ukraine to open bank accounts with Russian state-owned Promsvyazbank.[4] Head of Ukraine’s Kherson Oblast Administration Hennadiy Lahuta reported that Russian forces have locked down civilian traffic in northern Kherson Oblast and are not allowing anyone to enter or exit occupied territory, which may be an additional attempt to control the civilian population in preparation for annexation measures.[5]

Ukrainian sources warned on June 29 that Russian forces may be planning a false flag provocation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) to accuse Ukrainian authorities of mishandling nuclear facilities.[6] Ukrainian nuclear operating enterprise Energoatom stated that Russian occupation authorities are planning to throw unsafe objects into the cooling system at the NPP in order to compromise the plant’s cooling mechanisms.[7] Mayor of Enerhodar Dmytro Orlov added that Russian troops have been kidnapping and torturing employees of the NPP to coerce confessions that employees dropped weapons into the cooling systems to sabotage the plant and blame Ukrainian authorities for paying inadequate attention to the management of the NPP.[8] Russian troops have previously demonstrated irresponsible and dangerous behavior in and around nuclear power plants, firing on nuclear facilities at the Zaporizhzhia NPP in early March and digging into radioactive soil in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.[9]

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian sources reported that Russian authorities may be preparing to annex areas of southern Ukraine as the “Tavriia Gubernia” and that Russian authorities are setting conditions for annexation through preparing referenda in occupied areas.**
- **Russian forces may be planning a false flag provocation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations in and around Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces made marginal gains east of Bakhmut along the E40 highway and may seek to prepare for a direct offensive on Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations to advance on Slovyansk from the northwest near the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border.**
- **Russian forces are continuing to engage in offensive operations north of Kharkiv City, indicating that the Kremlin has territorial ambitions beyond the Donbas that will continue to attrit manpower and equipment, potentially at the cost of offensive power on more critical axes of advance.**
- **Russian forces continued to reinforce their defensive presence along the Southern Axis.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 28

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, Mason Clark, and Grace Mappes
June 28, 7:45 pm ET

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Ukrainian forces are likely conducting a fighting withdrawal that may include pulling back from Lysychansk and Luhansk Oblast in the near future and which probably aims to force the Russian offensive to culminate prematurely. The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Ambassador to Russia Rodion Miroshnik and Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces began a large-scale withdrawal from Lysychansk towards Siversk, Kramatorsk, and Slovyansk on June 28.[1] Although ISW cannot confirm independently Miroshnik's claims of an ongoing withdrawal, Ukrainian forces may continue the fighting withdrawal that began in Severodonetsk to Ukrainian strongholds around Siversk, Kramatorsk, and Slovyansk. The staunch but limited Ukrainian defense of Severodonetsk imposed high costs on the Russians despite new Russian tactics intended to limit Russian casualties. Kyiv could continue this approach until the Russian attack culminates or Ukrainian forces reach more defensible positions along a straighter line dotted with fortified cities and towns.

The pace and outcome of the next phase of the current campaign may depend in part on Russia's ability to recoup combat power from the forces that participated in the Battle of Severodonetsk. The remaining Russian forces in Severodonetsk will need to cross the Siverskyi Donets River into Lysychansk from Severodonetsk or its surrounding settlements to participate further in the Russian offensive. This movement could require some time since the Russians destroyed the three main bridges across the river near the city. Miroshnik claimed that Russian forces have already crossed the Siverskyi Donets River from Kreminna and are building bridgeheads for further attacks on Lysychansk from the north.[2] ISW cannot independently verify Miroshnik's claims. If they are true, and Russian forces threaten to complete the cauldron by pushing from the north and southwest of Lysychansk, then Ukrainian forces will likely abandon Lysychansk as well and conduct a fighting withdrawal to more defensible positions. Russian forces that have engaged in continuous offensive operations in Severodonetsk will also require some time to restore combat capabilities before participating in an assault on northern or northeastern Lysychansk. An unnamed Pentagon official stated that Russian forces continue to endure significant losses in fights for small territorial gains, and Russian groups that fought in Severodonetsk likely lost personnel and equipment.[3] The locations and strength of the Russian troops that seized Severodonetsk remain unclear at this time, however. A notable acceleration of Russian attacks from the south of Lysychansk or from across the Siverskyi Donets River would likely indicate that the Russians have completed a redeployment of forces from Severodonetsk. ISW has not yet observed such indicators.

Ukraine's Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) reported that the Kremlin replaced Western Military District (WMD) Commander Alexander Zhuravlev with the former commander of the 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Andrey Sychevoy.[4] CIT added that WMD Chief of Staff Aleksey Zavizion was relieved. ISW cannot independently verify these reports and will continue to monitor the situation for further corroboration.

Russian forces continue to look for additional reserves to replenish personnel losses in Ukraine, but these reserves are unlikely to initiate rotations or provide combat-ready manpower. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov announced that he will form four new battalions "with an impressive number of personnel" on June 26.[5] Kadyrov also announced that Chechen forces formed a West-Akhmat battalion "in the shortest possible" time and claimed that the unit would deploy to a well-equipped base in Chechnya. Chechen forces will likely deploy the newly-created battalion to the frontline without sufficient training. Social media users also released footage of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) rounding up "volunteers" in Donetsk City as part of the recruitment campaign on June 28.[6] Wives of servicemen of the Russian 5th Guards Separate Tank Brigade issued a video plea for the immediate rotation of their husbands back home, noting that their husbands had left their permanent bases of deployment in January 2022 for "exercises in Belarus." [7] The video indicates that the Russian military command has expressed its intentions for unit rotations.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to launch assault operations south and southwest of Lysychansk. The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) officials claimed that Ukrainian forces had begun to withdraw from the city, but ISW cannot confirm these claims.**
- **Russian forces launched unsuccessful offensive operations north of Slovyansk and conducted spoiling attacks on settlements west of Izyum, likely to disrupt Ukrainian counteroffensives.**
- **Russian forces failed to advance along the Kharkiv City-Belgorod highway and continued to undertake measures to hinder Ukrainian advances towards the international border or Izyum.**

- Ukrainian forces continued to launch counteroffensives north of Kherson City and reportedly liberated two settlements.
- Russian forces continued to transfer military equipment and personnel east of Melitopol.
- Russian occupation authorities are maintaining unsuccessful efforts to introduce ruble salary payments and set conditions to inflate electoral numbers in a future referendum.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 27

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

By Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, George Barros and Grace Mappes

June 27, 4:45pm ET

A Russian missile strike hit a shopping mall in a residential area of Kremenchuk, Poltava Oblast on June 27, likely killing many civilians.^[1] Ukrainian sources stated that over 1,000 civilians were inside the mall at the time of the strike, and officials are still clarifying the number of casualties.^[2] The Kremenchuk strike follows a wider intensification of Russian missile strikes against Ukrainian infrastructure and civilian targets in recent days. Advisor to the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs Vadym Denisenko stated on June 26 that Russian forces have begun a campaign of massive and largely indiscriminate missile strikes against Ukrainian cities, which echoes statements made by an unnamed US defense official on June 27 that Russian forces are increasingly relying on artillery and missile strikes to advance operations in Ukraine.^[3] As Russian forces continue to burn through their supply of high-precision weaponry, such attacks that cause substantial collateral civilian damage will likely escalate.^[4] **Russian military authorities continue to seek ways to replenish their increasingly exhausted force capabilities without announcing general mobilization.** An unnamed senior US defense official stated on June 27 that Russian forces are likely running low on senior military leaders and are relying more heavily on retired officers and reserves to replace officer casualties.^[5] The UK Ministry of Defense similarly reported that Russian forces will likely rely heavily on reserve echelons, namely the Combat Army Reserve (BARS) and Human Mobilization Resource, in order to galvanize volunteer support and fill out the third battalion tactical group (BTG) within regular (and depleted) brigades.^[6] As ISW has previously assessed, such reserves are unlikely to provide Russian forces with meaningful regeneration of force capabilities.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces struck a shopping mall in Kremenchuk as part of a recent escalation in strikes against Ukrainian infrastructure and cities.
- Russian forces made incremental advances southwest of Lysychansk near the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway but have not entirely severed Ukrainian lines of communication into Bakhmut.
- Russian forces made measured advances during offensive operations to the east of Bakhmut.
- Ukrainian forces repelled Russian offensives north of Slovyansk.
- Russian forces made limited and localized attacks along contested frontlines around Kharkiv City but did not make any advances on June 27.
- Ukrainian counteroffensives along the Southern Axis continue to force Russian troops to prioritize defensive operations along the line of contact.
- Russian occupation authorities are taking steps to strengthen economic control of occupied territories and force Ukrainian civilians to switch to the ruble.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 27, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 26

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, and Grace Mappes

June 26, 4:30pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces conducted a massive missile strike against the Schevchenkivskyi district of Kyiv on June 26, likely to coincide with the ongoing summit of G7 leaders.^[1] This is the first such major strike on Kyiv since late April and is likely a direct response to Western leaders discussing aid to Ukraine at the ongoing G7 summit, much like the previous strikes on April 29 during UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' visit to Kyiv.^[2] Ukrainian government sources reported that Russian forces targeted infrastructure in the Shevchenkivskyi district using X101 missiles fired from Tu-95 and Tu-160 bombers over the Caspian Sea and noted the Russian attack was an attempt to "show off" their capabilities.^[3] Open-source Twitter account GeoConfirmed stated that the strikes targeted the general vicinity of the Artem State Joint-Stock Holding Company, a manufacturer of air-to-air missiles, automated air-guided missile training and maintenance systems, anti-tank guided missiles, and aircraft equipment.^[4] GeoConfirmed noted that Russian forces likely fired the missiles from the maximum possible range, which would have interfered with GPS and radar correlation and resulted in the strike hitting civilian infrastructure, and additionally hypothesized some of the missiles may have been fired from Russian-occupied southern Ukraine.^[5] Russian forces likely targeted the Artem Plant as a means of posturing against Western military aid to Ukraine during the G7 summit and inflicted additional secondary damage to residential infrastructure.^[6]

The Kremlin continues to manipulate Russian legislation to carry out "covert mobilization" to support operations in Ukraine without conducting full mobilization. The Russian State Duma announced plans to review an amendment to the law on military service on June 28 that would allow military officials to offer contracts to young men immediately upon "coming of age" or graduating high school, thus circumventing the need to complete military service as conscripts.^[7] Head of the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Kyrylo Budanov stated on June 25 that the Kremlin is carrying out "covert mobilization" and that due to continuous Russian mobilization efforts, Ukrainian forces cannot wait for the Russians to exhaust their offensive potential before launching counteroffensives.^[8] Budanov remarked that the Kremlin has already committed 330,000 personnel to the war, which constitutes over a third of the entirety of the Russian Armed Forces, and that Russian President Vladimir Putin will face substantial domestic and social opposition if he increases this number by carrying out general (as opposed to covert) mobilization, as ISW has previously assessed.

Colonel-General Genady Zhidko, current director of Russia's Military-Political Directorate, is likely in overall command of Russian forces in Ukraine. Zhidko sat next to and conferred with Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu during an inspection of Russian ground forces in Ukraine on June 26, though Zhidko's nameplate was notably blurred out by the Russian Ministry of Defense and his position has not been officially confirmed, unlike the commanders of Russia's two force groupings in Ukraine that ISW reported on June 26.^[9] Conflict Intelligence Team previously reported on May 26 that Zhidko replaced Commander of the Southern Military District Alexander Dvornikov as overall commander in Ukraine, though ISW could not independently verify this change at the time.^[10] Reports on June 21 of Dvornikov's dismissal and Zhidko's prominent place in Shoigu's June 26 visit likely confirm this change.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces conducted a missile strike against Kyiv for the first time since April 29, likely to coincide with the ongoing G7 leadership summit.**
- **Russian Colonel-General Gennday Zhidko has likely taken over the role of theatre commander of operations in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces continued attacks against the southern outskirts of Lysychansk and consolidated control of Severodonetsk and surrounding settlements.**
- **Russian forces are conducting operations to the east of Bakhmut to maintain control of the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway.**
- **Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground assaults to the northwest of Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces intensified artillery strikes against Ukrainian positions along the Southern Axis.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are escalating measures to stem Ukrainian partisan activity in occupied areas through increased filtration measures and the abduction of civilians.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 25

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros
June 25, 5:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced the commanders of the “central” and “southern” groupings of forces in Ukraine on June 24, confirming previously rumored changes reported on June 21.[1] Spokesperson for the Russian MoD Igor Konashenkov stated on June 24 that Commander of the Central Military District Colonel General Alexander Lapin is in command of the “central” group of forces, which is responsible for operations against Lysychansk (and presumably Severodonetsk).[2] Konashenkov additionally stated that Army General Sergei Surovikin, commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces, commands the “southern” group of forces and oversaw the encirclement of Hirske and Zolote.[3] The Russian MoD’s announcement confirms ISW’s assessment from June 21 that the Russian high command is reshuffling and restructuring military command in order to better organize operations in Ukraine, though the Russian MoD statement does not state when the changes occurred.[4] The UK MoD confirmed that the Russian command has removed several generals from key operational roles in Ukraine, including Commander of the Airborne Forces (VDV) Colonel General Andrei Serdyukov and Commander of Russia’s Southern Military District Alexander Dvornikov, who was likely acting as overall theatre commander.[5] The UK MoD noted that command of the Southern Military District will transfer to Surovikin.[6] The Russian MoD’s statement notably only discusses the center and south *force groupings* (not the Southern Military District as a whole), but Dvornikov has likely been removed from his previous role.

Russian forces conducted an abnormally large series of missile strikes against Ukrainian rear areas on June 25.[7] The Ukrainian Airforce Command reported that Russian forces fired over 50 ground-, air-, and sea-based missiles at Ukraine and targeted areas in Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Khmelnytskyi, Chernihiv, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts.[8] The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that six Russian Tu-22M3 bombers departed from the Shaykova airbase in Belarus and launched 12 Kh-22 cruise missiles at land targets in Kyiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv Oblasts, which is the first such launch from Belarus.[9] The Ukrainian Airforce Command noted that Russian forces used sea-based Kalibr missiles against targets in western Ukraine, X-22 and ground-based Iskander and Tochka-U missiles against targets in northern Ukraine, and ONYX missiles and Bastion complexes against targets in southern Ukraine.[10] Ukrainian air defense reportedly shot down many of the missiles, which were likely intended to target critical support infrastructure in areas of Ukraine where there is no direct combat.

Ukrainian intelligence assessed that the Kremlin is continuing covert partial mobilization efforts in support of what it increasingly recognizes as a war of attrition in Eastern

Ukraine.[11] Representative of the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Vadym Skibitsky stated that the Kremlin recognizes it is waging a war of attrition and is conducting secretive partial mobilization efforts while additionally mobilizing the BARS (Combat Army Reserve of the Country) system and other constant-readiness elements. Skibitsky noted that 105 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) are taking part in the war in Ukraine and that Russian reserve capabilities could increase this number to anywhere between 150 and 160 BTGs but did not specify a timeframe for this mobilization. Skibitsky reiterated that the Kremlin’s main goal is to secure control of the entire Donbas and that its secondary priority is consolidation of its control of Kherson Oblast by September 11, when the Kremlin seeks to hold referenda to directly annex territories or create quasi-state “People’s Republics.” The Kremlin intends to conduct a protracted conflict in Ukraine and is seeking to advance mobilization efforts to support long-term military and political goals in occupied areas of Ukraine.

Ukraine’s Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) firmly stated that Belarusian involvement in the war in Ukraine on behalf of Russia remains highly unlikely.[12] GUR representative Vadym Skibitsky stated that Belarusian forces will not attack Ukraine without the support of Russian troops, of which there are approximately 1,500 in Belarus. Skibitsky noted that Belarus has seven BTGs on a rotating basis near the border with Ukraine and that the formation of a Russian-Belarusian joint shock group would take three to four weeks, with two to three weeks needed to simply deploy sufficient Russian forces into Belarus. The GUR’s statement reaffirms ISW’s previous assessments that, while recent Belarusian actions along the Ukrainian border are threatening and likely intended to fix Ukrainian forces in place with the threat of Belarusian action, they are highly unlikely to preempt actual involvement in the war.[13]

Key Takeaways

- The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that the leadership of its central and southern groups of forces fighting Ukraine has changed, confirming ISW's previous assessment that the Russian high command is restructuring the leadership of operations in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian intelligence officials emphasized that Belarus remains highly unlikely to join the war in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian sources confirmed that Russian forces have taken full control of Severodonetsk and are fighting within Lysychansk.
- Russian forces made measured gains to the north and southeast of Bakhmut.
- Russian forces continued unsuccessful attempts to advance southeast of Izyum toward Slovyansk.
- Russian forces continued positional battles north of Kharkiv City.
- Russian forces attempted to strengthen their defensive lines and recapture lost positions on the Southern Axis.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 25, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 24

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, George Barros, and Grace Mappes
June 24, 7:15 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Ukrainian officials ordered a controlled withdrawal of troops from Severodonetsk on June 24. Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai announced that Ukrainian forces are withdrawing from “broken positions” in Severodonetsk to prevent further personnel losses and maintain a stronger defense elsewhere.^[1] Severodonetsk Regional Military Administration Head Roman Vlasenko stated that several Ukrainian units remain in Severodonetsk as of June 24, but Ukrainian forces will complete the full withdrawal in “a few days.”^[2] An unnamed Pentagon official noted that Ukrainian withdrawal from Severodonetsk will allow Ukrainian troops to secure better defensive positions and further wear down Russian manpower and equipment.^[3] The Pentagon official noted that Russian forces pushing on Severodonetsk already show signs of “wear and tear” and “debilitating morale,” which will only further slow Russian offensive operations in Donbas. Russian forces have been attempting to seize Severodonetsk since at least March 13, exhausting their forces and equipment over three months.^[4]

Ukrainian forces will likely maintain their defenses around Lysychansk and continue to exhaust Russian troops after the fall of Severodonetsk. Ukrainian forces will occupy higher ground in Lysychansk, which may allow them to repel Russian attacks for some time if the Russians are unable to encircle or isolate them. Russian forces in Severodonetsk will also need to complete river crossings from the east, which will require additional time and effort. Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik claimed that Russian forces will completely encircle Lysychansk in the next two or three days after fully interdicting Ukrainian ground lines of communications (GLOCs).^[5] Russian forces have successfully secured access to Ukrainian GLOCs along the Hirske–Lysychansk highway by breaking through Hirske on June 24, but Russian forces will need to cut Ukrainian logistics routes from Bakhmut and Siversk to fully isolate Lysychansk. Russian forces are likely to face challenges completing a larger encirclement around Lysychansk due to a failed river crossing in Bilohorivka, northwest of Lysychansk, in early May. Ukrainian forces will likely conduct a deliberate withdrawal from Lysychansk if Russian forces threaten Ukrainian strongholds in the area.

Ukrainian intelligence warned that Russian forces will carry out false-flag attacks in Belarus to draw Belarusian forces into the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russian sabotage groups and mercenaries arrived in Mozyr, Belarus, to detonate apartment buildings and civilian infrastructure around the city.^[6] The GUR noted that Russian saboteurs will follow a pattern similar to apartment bombings in Chechnya in the early 2000s. Ukrainian officials have previously reported on possible false-flag attacks in Belarus throughout the past four months.

Unidentified assailants resumed attacks against Russian military recruitment centers on June 24, indicating intensifying discontent with covert mobilization. Russian outlet Baza reported two incidents where unknown attackers threw Molotov Cocktails at military recruitment offices in Belgorod City and Perm on June 24.^[7] Baza also reported that Belgorod Oblast Police started a search for four contract servicemen—one sergeant and three ordinary soldiers—who have deserted their military unit stationed in Belgorod Oblast.^[8]

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces continued to drive north to Lysychansk and have likely encircled Ukrainian troops in Hirske–Zolote.
- Ukrainian officials announced that Ukrainian forces are fighting their last battles in the industrial zone of Severodonetsk before withdrawing from the city.
- Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations west of Izyum and north of Slovyansk. Russian forces will likely prioritize encircling Ukrainian troops in Lysychansk and interdicting remaining GLOCs northwest of the city before resuming a full-scale offensive operation on Slovyansk.
- Ukrainian forces are continuing to launch counteroffensive operations along the Kherson–Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border and are threatening Russian forces in Kherson City.
- Ukrainian partisans continued to attack Russian collaborators in Kherson City.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 23

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, and Grace Mappes

June 23, 6:15 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

While Belarus and Russia retain close military cooperation and the ongoing Belarusian exercises are likely intended in part to threaten Ukraine, Belarus remains unlikely to enter the war in Ukraine on behalf of Russia. As ISW has previously assessed, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko likely cannot afford the domestic consequences of involving his limited military assets in a costly foreign war.[5] Unsupported Belarusian forces are additionally highly unlikely to be effective, and Russia lacks the reserves necessary to conduct another offensive toward Kyiv. These exercises are undoubtedly intended to posture and threaten Ukrainian border areas but are unlikely to preempt actual involvement in hostilities.

Russian forces have made substantial gains in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area over the last several days and Ukrainian troops continue to suffer high casualties, but Ukrainian forces have fundamentally accomplished their objective in the battle by slowing down and degrading Russian forces. Head of the Luhansk Oblast Administration Serhiy Haidai stated on June 23 that Ukrainian troops may have to retreat to avoid encirclement in Lysychansk, which indicates that Ukrainian authorities are setting conditions to prepare for the ultimate loss of both Severodonetsk and Lysychansk.[6] As ISW has previously assessed, however, the loss of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk will not represent a major turning point in the war.[7] Ukrainian troops have succeeded for weeks in drawing substantial quantities of Russian personnel, weapons, and equipment into the area and have likely degraded Russian forces' overall capabilities while preventing Russian forces from focusing on more advantageous axes of advance. Russian offensive operations will likely stall in the coming weeks, whether or not Russian forces capture the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area, likely granting Ukrainian forces the opportunity to launch prudent counteroffensives. The Kremlin's ideological fixation on the capture of Severodonetsk, much like the earlier siege of Azovstal, will likely be to the ultimate detriment of Russian capabilities in future advances in Ukraine. The loss of Severodonetsk is a loss for Ukraine in the sense that *any* terrain captured by Russian forces is a loss—but the battle of Severodonetsk will not be a decisive Russian victory.

Key Takeaways

- **Belarusian forces are conducting mobilization exercises along the Ukrainian border but are unlikely to enter the war in Ukraine due to their low capabilities and the adverse domestic implications of military involvement on behalf of Russia.**
- **Russian forces have likely reached the southern outskirts of Lysychansk and are reinforcing their grouping around Severodonetsk to complete the capture of both Severodonetsk and Lysychansk. These gains remain unlikely to provide Russian forces with a decisive edge in further operations in Ukraine and have further degraded Russian capabilities.**
- **Russian forces are continuing efforts to encircle the Ukrainian grouping in Hirske and Zolote and are likely moving to take control of these settlements.**
- **Russian forces have likely successfully interdicted Ukrainian lines of communication along the T1302 highway and are using recent gains along the highway to reinforce assaults on Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces amassed equipment and continued building defensive capabilities along the Southern Axis.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 22

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, George Barros, and Grace Mappes
June 22, 5:45 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Reinforced Russian air-defense systems in eastern Ukraine are increasingly limiting the effectiveness of Ukrainian drones, undermining a key Ukrainian capability in the war. *Foreign Policy's* Jack Detsch quoted several anonymous Ukrainian officials and military personnel that Ukrainian forces have largely halted the use of Turkish Bayraktar drones, which were used to great effect earlier in the war, due to improvements in Russian air-defense capabilities.[1] Ukrainian officials are reportedly increasingly concerned that US-provided Gray Eagle strike drones will also be shot down by reinforced Russian air defense over the Donbas.[2] Ukrainian forces have reportedly scaled back air operations to 20 to 30 sorties per day and are facing a deficit of available aircraft for active pilots. Russian forces are likely prioritizing deploying air defenses to eastern Ukraine to nullify Ukrainian operations and to protect the artillery systems Russian forces are reliant on to make advances. However, the Ukrainian air force and armed drones remain active elsewhere, inflicting several successful strikes on targets in Kherson Oblast in the last week.

Members of the Russian military community continue to comment on the shortcomings of Russian force generation capabilities, which are having tangible impacts on the morale and discipline of Russians fighting in Ukraine. Russian milblogger Yuri Kotyenok claimed that Russian troops lack the numbers and strength for success in combat in Ukraine.[3] Kotyenok accused Russian leadership of deploying new and under-trained recruits and called for replenishment of forces with well-trained recruits with ground infantry experience—though the Russian military is unlikely to be able to quickly generate such a force, as ISW has previously assessed. Despite growing calls for increased recruitment from nationalist figures, Russian leadership continues to carry out coercive partial mobilization efforts that are only producing limited numbers of replacements while negatively impacting the morale and discipline of forcibly mobilized personnel. Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) claimed that Russian authorities in Luhansk are arranging gas leaks in apartment buildings to force men who are hiding from mobilization into the streets.[4] The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) additionally reported that Russian soldiers in occupied Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast, are appealing to local Ukrainian doctors to issue them certificates alleging medical inability to continue military service.[5]

Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike (likely with a loitering munition, though this cannot be confirmed) on a Russian oil refinery in Novoshakhtinsk, Rostov Oblast, on June 22.[6] Russian Telegram channel Voenyi Osvedomitel claimed that the strike, which targeted Russian infrastructure within 15 km of the Ukrainian border, originated from Donetsk Oblast.[7] Ukrainian forces have not targeted Russian infrastructure for several weeks, and this strike is likely an attempt to disrupt Russian logistics and fuel supply to Russian operations in eastern Ukraine.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to make gains to the south of Lysychansk and will likely reach the city in the coming days, although they are unlikely to quickly capture the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations towards Slovyansk and made minor advances.**
- **Russian forces intensified efforts to interdict Ukrainian lines of communication along the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway in order to support Russian operations towards Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces focused on defensive operations along the Southern Axis and may have made marginal gains within Mykolaiv Oblast.**
- **Russian authorities are continuing measures to facilitate the economic integration of occupied areas.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 22, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 21

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, Kateryna Stepanenko, George Barros, and Grace Mappes
June 21, 7:45 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

The Kremlin recently replaced the commander of the Russian Airborne (VDV) forces and may be in the process of radically reshuffling the command structure of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, indicating a possible purge of senior officers blamed for failures in Ukraine. Several Russian outlets confirmed that the current Chief of Staff of the Central Military District, Colonel-General Mikhail Teplinsky, will replace the current Commander of the Russian Airborne Forces, Colonel-General Andrey Serdyukov.[1] Ukrainian sources previously reported on June 17 that the Kremlin fired Serdyukov for poor performance during the invasion and high casualties among paratroopers, but ISW could not confirm this reporting at the time.[2] Several sources are additionally reporting contradictory claims about replacements for the current Southern Military District Commander—and overall commander of the Russian invasion of Ukraine—Army General Alexander Dvornikov:

- Russian reserve officer Oleg Marzoev claimed on June 21 that Russian military officials will soon appoint General of the Army Sergey Surovkin, the current commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces, as commander of the Southern Military District (SMD), effectively replacing current SMD Commander Alexander Dvornikov.[3]
 - Investigative journalism group Bellingcat previously reported on June 17 that Russian President Vladimir Putin planned to replace Dvornikov as the commander of the invasion of Ukraine following Dvornikov's excessive drinking and lack of trust among Russian forces.[4]
 - Ukraine's Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) reported on June 19 that Putin replaced Dvornikov as the commander of the Ukrainian operation with Colonel-General Gennady Zhidko, the head of the Military-Political Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces.[5]
 - An unofficial but widely followed Russian Airborne Troops social media page claimed that Dvornikov has been promoted and that Serdyukov will take his position within the SMD. This claim is highly unlikely to be true given that pro-Kremlin sources announced Serdyukov's retirement.[6]
- ISW cannot independently verify these reports and will continue to monitor the situation for corroboration. However, if these varied reports are all accurate, former Aerospace Forces Commander Surovkin has replaced Dvornikov (who may have been forced to retire) as commander of the Southern Military District, but Zhidko has been appointed commander of Russian operations in Ukraine, despite not directly commanding Russian combat troops in his permanent role. Zhidko currently directs the body of the Russian Ministry of Defense responsible for maintaining morale and ideological control within the Russian military, rather than commanding a military district. As ISW previously reported, Southern Military District Commander Dvornikov was the natural choice to command Russia's operations in Ukraine following Russia's loss in the Battle of Kyiv, as the majority of Russian offensive operations are occurring within the Southern Military District's area of responsibility. The appointment of a separate commander over the Southern Military District, and the replacement of the commander of the SMD in the middle of major combat operations, is a drastic step that would speak to severe crises within the Russian high command, and possibly a purge by the Kremlin. **Such drastic rotations within the Russian military, if true, are not actions taken by a force on the verge of a major success and indicate ongoing dysfunction in the Kremlin's conduct of the war.**

Russian forces are successfully advancing toward Lysychansk from the south rather than making an opposed river crossing from Severodonetsk, threatening Ukrainian defenses in the area. ISW previously forecasted that Russian forces would seek to attack toward Lysychansk from the south to negate the defensive advantage that the Siverskyi Donetsk River would grant Ukrainian defenders opposing a direct assault from Severodonetsk. Russian forces appear to be securing such an advance and will likely attack the outskirts of Lysychansk within the coming week. **This Russian advance is a clear setback for Ukrainian defenses in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area, but Russian forces will likely require further protracted battles with Ukrainian forces similar to the block-by-block fighting seen in Mariupol and Severodonetsk in order to capture Lysychansk.**

The Kremlin is failing to deter the family members of sailors that survived the sinking of the *Moskva* from issuing an appeal against the deployment of surviving conscripts to the war in Ukraine as of June 20.[7] Russian opposition outlet *Novaya Gazeta* published an appeal from the parents of the surviving 49 conscript crewmembers of the *Moskva*, demanding that the Military Prosecutor's Office in Sevastopol, the Committee of Soldier's Mothers, and the Human Rights Commissioner immediately terminate the crewmembers' deployment. The appeal states that Russian commanders did not send the surviving conscripts home from their deployment following the sinking of *Moskva* and that they will be recommitted to hostilities on June 30. The appeal noted that the survivors refuse to participate in further assignments due to psychological distress and are currently stationed on

the old ship *Ladnyi*, which the appeal claims is unfit for combat. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) previously reported that Russian forces have threatened the families of *Moskva* sailors with criminal prosecution and nullification of any financial benefits to prevent them from speaking out against Russian operations.[8]

Russian forces continue to face force generation challenges and are committing unprepared contract servicemen to the invasion of Ukraine. The BBC's Russian service reported on June 20 that new Russian recruits receive only 3 to 7 days of training before being sent to "the most active sectors of the front." [9] The BBC also reported that volunteers within the conventional Russian military, Rosgvardia units, and Wagner Group mercenaries have become Russia's main assault force, as opposed to full conventional military units. ISW has previously assessed that Russian units in eastern Ukraine are suffering from poor complements of infantry, slowing their ability to seize urban terrain. The Russian military is offering substantial financial incentives to secure additional recruits with increasing disregard for their age, health, criminal records, and other established service qualifications. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on June 21 that Russian Airborne (VDV) units are forced to recruit reserve officers for short-term three-month contracts due to significant officer losses, and the BBC reported that the Russian Ministry of Defense is offering to pay off the loans and debts of volunteers to entice recruits.[10]

Key Takeaways

- **The Kremlin recently replaced the commander of the Russian Airborne (VDV) forces and may have fired the commander of the Southern Military District and appointed a new overall commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, indicating ongoing dysfunction in the Kremlin's conduct of the war.**
- **Russian forces conducted several successful advances in settlements southeast of Severodonetsk on June 21 and may be able to threaten Lysychansk in the coming days while avoiding a difficult opposed crossing of the Siverskyi Donets River.**
- **Russian forces continued to launch assaults on settlements along the T1302 Lysychansk-Bakhmut highway to interdict Ukrainian ground lines of communications (GLOCs).**
- **Russian operations along the Izyum-Sloviansk axis are increasingly stalled as Russian forces prioritize operations around Severodonetsk.**
- **Russian forces likely recaptured the eastern bank of the Inhulets River from the Ukrainian bridgehead situated near the Kherson-Mykolaiv Oblast border.**
- **Ukrainian forces reportedly struck Russian positions on Snake Island in the Black Sea, likely to destroy Russian fortifications and equipment on the island, but ISW cannot confirm competing Ukrainian and Russian claims of the results of the attack.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are continuing to face challenges recruiting local collaborators and are likely relying on Russian government personnel to consolidate their societal control of occupied Ukrainian territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 21, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 20

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Frederick W. Kagan

June 20, 5:30 pm ET

[Click here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Ukrainian officials are emphasizing that the coming week will be decisive for Russian efforts to take control of Severodonetsk. Deputy Ukrainian Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported that Russian

leadership has set June 26 as the deadline for Russian forces to reach the Luhansk Oblast administrative border, which will likely result in intensified efforts to take full control of Severodonetsk and move westward towards the Oblast border. Head of the Luhansk Regional State Administration Serhiy Haidai reported that Russian forces control all of Severodonetsk except for the industrial zone as of June 20, which is the first explicit Ukrainian confirmation that Russian forces control all of Severodonetsk with the exception of the Azot plant. Russian forces will likely continue efforts to clear the Azot plant and complete encirclement operations south of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk by driving up the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway.

Russian authorities likely seek to leverage the consequences of Russia's blockade on Ukrainian grain exports in order to cajole the West into weakening its sanctions. Head of state-owned propaganda outlet *RT* Margarita Simonyan stated on June 20 that the famine caused by Russia's blockade on grain exports will force the rest of the world to lift sanctions in order to curb further effects of global famine. Simonyan's statement is especially salient considering a report by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office that Ukraine had generated 12% of global wheat and barley exports and that Russia's blockade has trapped over 20 million tons of grain in storage.

The UK Ministry of Defense claimed on June 20 that consistent failures of the Russian air force have significantly contributed to Russia's limited success in Ukraine. The UK MoD emphasized that the Russian air force has continually underperformed and been largely risk-averse, failing to establish air superiority or give Russian forces a decisive advantage in Ukraine. The report additionally claimed that training procedures for air force personnel are scripted and designed to impress senior officials but do not adequately prepare personnel for the challenges of active air combat.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian sources stated that the coming week will be decisive for Russian forces to complete the capture of Severodonetsk and that Russian forces will focus troops and equipment on the area.**
- **Ukrainian sources confirmed that Russian forces control all of Severodonetsk with the exception of the Azot industrial zone, where fights are ongoing.**
- **Russian sources are likely setting information conditions to justify slow and unsuccessful advances towards Slovyansk from the southeast of Izyum and west of Lyman.**
- **Russian forces are likely intensifying operations to interdict Ukrainian lines of communication along the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway in order to support escalating operations in Severodonetsk-Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces continued to focus on resisting further Ukrainian advances north of Kharkiv City towards the international border.**
- **Russian forces are continuing defensive operations along the Southern Axis.**
- **Ukrainian partisan activity is continuing to complicate efforts by Russian occupation authorities to consolidate control of occupied areas.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 20, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 19

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Mason Clark

June 19, 5:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

The UK Ministry of Defense assesses that the Kremlin's continued framing of its invasion of Ukraine as a "special military operation" rather than a war is actively hindering Russian force generation capabilities. The UK Ministry of Defense reported on June 19 that Russian authorities are struggling to find legal means to punish military dissenters and those who refuse to mobilize because the classification of the conflict in Ukraine as a "special military operation" precludes legal punitive measures that could be employed during a formal war.[1] ISW has previously assessed that the Kremlin's framing of the war as a "special operation" is compounding consistent issues with poor perceptions of Russian military leadership among Russian nationalists, problems with paying troops, lack of available forces, and unclear objectives among Russian forces. The Kremlin is continuing to attempt to fight a major and grinding war in Ukraine with forces assembled for what the Kremlin incorrectly assumed would be a short invasion against token Ukrainian resistance. The Kremlin continues to struggle to correct this fundamental flaw in its "special military operation."

Russian authorities likely seek to use war crimes trials against captured Ukrainian servicemen, particularly troops that defended Mariupol, to advance its narratives around the war. Russian sources reported that the authorities of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) plan to hold war crimes tribunals until the end of August 2022 and that at least one of these tribunals will be held in Mariupol.[2] These tribunals will reportedly be judged in accordance with DNR legislation (which notably allows capital punishment, unlike Russian law) and be modeled on the Nuremberg format for war crimes trials. The trials are a sham attempt to try lawful prisoners of war as war criminals and support the Kremlin's false framing of its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine as a "de-Nazification" operation. Despite the fact that DNR authorities plan to try Ukrainian servicemen in the DNR, a source in Russian law enforcement told state-owned media outlet TASS that the deputy commander of the Azov Regiment and the commander of the Ukrainian 36th Marine Brigade will both be transferred to Russia for investigation and trial.[3] Russian authorities will likely use these trials to strengthen legal controls of occupied areas and further demoralize Ukrainian defenders by setting a harsh legal precedent during preliminary tribunals, as well as advancing the Kremlin's false narrative of invading Ukraine to "de-Nazify" it.

Key Takeaways

- **Concentrated Russian artillery power paired with likely understrength infantry units remains insufficient to enable Russian advances within Severodonetsk.**
- **Russian forces continued to prepare to advance on Sloviansk from southeast of Izyum and west of Lyman.**
- **Russian forces are focusing on strengthening defensive positions along the Southern Axis due to recent successful Ukrainian counterattacks along the Kherson-Mykolaiv Oblast border.**
- **Successful Ukrainian counterattacks in the Zaporizhia area are forcing Russian forces to rush reinforcements to this weakened sector of the front line.**
- **Russian forces are likely conducting false-flag artillery attacks against Russian-held territory to dissuade Ukrainian sentiment and encourage the mobilization of proxy forces.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 19, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 18

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, George Barros, and Grace Mappes

June 18, 3:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces made marginal gains on the outskirts of Severodonetsk on June 18 but have largely stalled along other axes of advance. Russian troops are likely facing mounting losses and troop and equipment degradation that will complicate attempts to renew offensive operations on other critical locations as the slow battle for Severodonetsk continues. As ISW previously assessed, Russian forces will likely be able to seize Severodonetsk in the coming weeks, but at the cost of concentrating most of their available forces in this small area. Other Russian operations in eastern Ukraine—such as efforts to capture Slovyansk and advance east of Bakhmut—have made little progress in the past two weeks. Russian forces are continuing to fight to push Ukrainian troops away from occupied frontiers north of Kharkiv City and along the Southern Axis, but have not made significant gains in doing so, thus leaving them vulnerable to Ukrainian counteroffensive and partisan pressure.

The Russian military continues to face challenges with the morale and discipline of its troops in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate released what it reported were intercepted phone calls on June 17 and 18 in which Russian soldiers complained about frontline conditions, poor equipment, and overall lack of personnel.^[1] One soldier claimed that units have been largely drained of personnel and that certain battalion tactical groups (BTGs) have only 10 to 15 troops remaining in service.^[2]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces secured minor gains on the outskirts of Severodonetsk and likely advanced into Metolchine, but Russian operations remain slow.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to interdict Ukrainian lines of communication along the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway and conducted ground and artillery strikes along the highway.**
- **Russian forces seek to push Ukrainian forces out of artillery range of railway lines around Kharkiv City used to supply Russian offensive operations toward Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces did not take any confirmed actions along the Southern Axis and continue to face partisan pressure in occupied areas of southern Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 18, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Campaign Assessment June 17

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, George Barros, and Grace Mappes
June 17, 7:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces are continuing to deploy additional forces to support offensive operations in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area, and Ukrainian defenses remain strong. Ukrainian Defense Ministry Spokesperson Oleksandr Motuzyanyk reported that Russian forces are transferring tanks, armored personnel carriers, engineering equipment, and vehicles from Svatove, along the Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in Luhansk Oblast, to Starobilsk, just 40 km east of Severodonetsk.[1] Social media users reported that Russian forces are likely redeploying equipment from northern Kharkiv Oblast to Donbas and published footage of Russian heavy artillery arriving by rail in Stary Osokol, Belgorod Oblast on June 17.[2] UK Chief of Defense Tony Radakin stated that Russian forces are “diminishing” in power by committing large quantities of personnel and equipment for incremental gains in one area.[3] The Russian military has concentrated the vast majority of its available combat power to capture Severodonetsk and Lysychansk at the expense of other axes of advance and is suffering heavy casualties to do so.

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that Russian forces will attack Ukrainian positions near Donetsk City but reiterated that the new tactic will require additional time during his address at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum on June 17.[4] Putin stated that Russian forces will stop what he claimed is Ukrainian shelling of Donetsk City by attacking Ukrainian fortifications from the rear. Putin may have amplified reports of shelling of civilian areas of Donetsk City, which Ukrainian officials have denied, to discourage Western officials from supplying weapons to Ukraine.[5] Putin also declared that Russian forces will fully complete the “special military operation” in Ukraine, and noted that Russian and proxy forces will intensify counter-battery combat.[6] Putin urged Russian forces to refrain from entirely destroying cities that they aim to “liberate,” ignoring the destruction Russian forces have inflicted on Ukrainian cities and the artillery-heavy tactics Russian forces are currently employing in Severodonetsk.”[7]

Unconfirmed Ukrainian sources report that the Kremlin fired the Commander of the Russian Airborne Forces, Colonel-General Andrey Serdyukov, due to mass casualties among Russian paratroopers. Odesa Oblast Military-Civil Administration Spokesperson Serhiy Bratchuk reported that the Kremlin appointed the current chief of staff of the Central Military District, Colonel-General Mikhail Teplinsky, as Serdyukov’s replacement and named the Deputy Commander of the Russian Airborne Forces, Lieutenant General Anatoly Kontsevoi, as the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Airborne Forces.[8][9] ISW cannot independently confirm these claims or Serdyukov’s exact role in the invasion of Ukraine, but they, if true, would indicate that Serdyukov is being held responsible for the poor performance of and high casualties among Russian VDV units, particularly in early operations around Kyiv. Continued dismissals and possible internal purges of senior Russian officers will likely further degrade poor Russian command and control capabilities and the confidence of Russian officers.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to launch unsuccessful ground assaults against Severodonetsk and its southeastern outskirts on June 17.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to sever Ukrainian lines of communication to Lysychansk, both from the north toward Slovyansk and in the south near Bakhmut.**
- **Ukrainian forces are likely conducting a counteroffensive northwest of Izyum intended to draw Russian forces away from offensive operations toward Slovyansk and disrupt Russian supply lines and are making minor gains.**
- **Ukrainian forces and aviation continued to strike Russian logistics and fortifications in occupied settlements along the Southern Axis, with localized fighting ongoing.**
- **Russian forces continued to regroup and transfer personnel within Zaporizhia Oblast to maintain defensive positions along the frontline.**
- **Russian President Putin reaffirmed his commitment to “completing” the Russian operation in Ukraine but acknowledged that unspecified new Russian tactics (which are likely simply explanations for poor Russian performance) will take time.**
- **Unconfirmed Ukrainian sources reported that the Kremlin fired the commander of the Russian Airborne Forces, Colonel-General Andrey Serdyukov, due to poor performance.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 17, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 16

Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, George Barros, and Grace Mappes

June 16, 7:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

The leaders of Germany, France, Italy, and Romania committed to Ukrainian officials that the West would not demand any concessions from Ukraine to appease Russia and will support Ukraine to

the end of the war during a visit to Kyiv on June 16. French President Emmanuel Macron declared that France, Germany, Italy, and Romania are “are doing everything so that Ukraine alone can decide its fate.”[1] Macron added that Ukraine “must be able to win” and pledged to provide six more self-propelled howitzers.[2] German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that Germany will continue to provide financial, humanitarian, and weapons assistance for “Ukraine’s war of independence.”[3] Macron, Scholz, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, and Romanian President Klaus Iohannis additionally vowed to back Ukraine’s bid to become an official candidate for European Union membership.[4] Sustained Western military support to Ukraine will be essential to enable Ukrainian forces to liberate Russian-occupied territory.

Ukrainian defense officials explicitly requested Western heavy artillery, unmanned aerial vehicles, and multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) ahead of a protracted war. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Denys Sharapov and Land Force Command Logistics Commander Volodymyr Karpenko stated that Ukrainian forces need hundreds of artillery systems, including infantry fighting vehicles and tanks, as Ukrainian forces have suffered 30% to 50% equipment losses in active combat.[5] Sharapov and Karpenko noted that Ukrainian forces need Predator drones and loitering munitions to accurately strike Russian forces. Sharapov and Karpenko also asked for long-range precision weapons such as MLRS to defend the entire 2,500 km frontline in Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials stated that Russian forces have already committed about 330,000 servicemen to their invasion of Ukraine without conducting partial or full-scale mobilization in Russia. Ukrainian General Staff Main Operations Deputy Chief Oleksiy Gromov stated that Russian forces grouped 150,000 servicemen into battalion tactical groups (BTGs) and other formations and involved additional 70,000 troops from air and sea elements, with the remaining personnel staffing non-combat support units.[6] Gromov noted that Russian forces committed more than 80,000 servicemen of the mobilized reserve, up to 7,000 reservists of the Russian Combat Army Reserve (BARS-2021), up to 18,000 members of the Russian National Guard (Rosguardia), and up to 8,000 troops from private military companies. Gromov did not specify if Ukrainian officials included information about forcibly mobilized servicemen in the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) in these numbers. Gromov noted that the Kremlin may still increase the number of Russian military personnel in Ukraine by executing covert or full mobilization.[7] Gromov noted that while it is unknown if the Kremlin will declare mobilization, Russian forces will still need time to execute the deployment and training of the new personnel whether or not the Kremlin announces full mobilization.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to launch ground assaults on Severodonetsk and settlements along the Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Lysychansk. Ukrainian military intelligence reported that Russian forces are no longer operating as concrete battalion tactical groups (BTGs), as ISW previously assessed.**
- **Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations northwest of Slovyansk, while Ukrainian forces reportedly resumed preparations for counteroffensives west of Izyum.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces engaged in clashes north and northeast of Kharkiv City, though no significant territory changed hands.**
- **Russian forces continued to fortify fallback positions in northwestern Kherson Oblast, likely in anticipation of Ukrainian counteroffensives in the region.**
- **Head of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Denis Pushilin continued to discuss and sign patronage agreements with Russian regional officials.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 16, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 15

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, and Grace Mappes
June 15, 6pm ET

Western officials announced additional military aid for Ukraine on June 15. US President Joe Biden pledged \$1 billion worth of military aid, including coastal defense weapons, advanced rocket systems, artillery, and ammunition to support Ukrainian operations. NATO members additionally announced they

will additionally continue to provide Ukraine with heavy weapons and long-range systems and plan to agree on a new assistance package after consultations with Ukraine's Defense Ministry. This newest round of military aid will be invaluable to support Ukrainian operations, especially in the face of increasingly protracted and artillery-heavy fighting against Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine, though Ukraine will require further sustained support.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces launched ground assaults in Severodonetsk and settlements in its vicinity but have not taken full control over the city as of June 15.**
- **Russian forces launched largely unsuccessful offensive operations around the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway in an effort to cut Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to advance along the E40 highway to Slovyansk and southeast of Izyum.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces continued to fight in northeastern settlements around Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces continued to fortify fallback positions in Zaporizhia and Kherson Oblasts, while undertaking defensive measures to strengthen Russian presence in the Black Sea.**
- **The Kremlin and proxy republics continue to pursue ad hoc annexation policies in occupied territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 15, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 14

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, George Barros, and Grace Mappes

June 14, 5:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

The Belarusian Armed Forces began a command-staff exercise focused on testing command and control capabilities on June 14. However, Belarus remains unlikely to join the war in Ukraine on behalf of Russia. Head of Logistics for the Belarusian Armed Forces Major General Andrei Burdyko announced that the exercise will involve military authorities, unspecified military units, and logistics organizations and is intended to improve the coherency of command-and-control and logistics support to increase the overall level of training and practical skills of personnel in a “dynamically changing environment.”^[1] Despite the launch of this exercise, Belarus remains unlikely to join the war in Ukraine due to the threat of domestic unrest that President Alexander Lukashenko faces if he involves already-limited Belarusian military assets in combat.^[2] Any Belarusian entrance into the war would also likely provoke further crippling sanctions on Belarus. Any unsupported Belarusian attack against northern Ukraine would likely be highly ineffective, and the quality of Belarusian troops remains low. ISW will continue to monitor Belarusian movements but does not forecast a Belarusian entrance into the war at this time.

Russian authorities may be accelerating plans to annex occupied areas of Ukraine and are arranging political and administrative contingencies for control of annexed territories. Russian military correspondent Sasha Kots posted an image of a map that was displayed at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum depicting a proposed scheme for the “administrative-territorial” division of Ukraine following the war on a three-to-five-year transition scale.^[3] The proposed scheme divides Ukrainian oblasts into Russian “territorial districts” and suggests the manner in which Russian authorities hope to incorporate Ukrainian territory directly into Russia. Advisor to the Mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryushchenko additionally outlined a series of indicators that he claimed suggest that Russian authorities are planning to annex occupied Donetsk Oblast as soon as September 1, 2022.^[4] Andryushchenko stated that the leadership of occupied Donetsk has entirely passed from authorities of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) to Russian officials and that Russian educational authorities are already referring to Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson as regions of Russia. Andryushchenko additionally stated that the financial and legal systems in occupied Donetsk have already transitioned to Russian systems. Despite the apparent lack of a Kremlin-backed mandate concerning the condition of occupied areas, Russian authorities are likely pushing to expedite a comprehensive annexation process in order to consolidate control over Ukrainian territories and integrate them into Russia’s political and economic environment. However, the Kremlin retains several options in occupied Ukrainian territory and is not bound to any single annexation plan.

The Russian military leadership continues to expand its pool of eligible recruits by manipulating service requirements. Russian milblogger Yuri Kotyenok suggested that Russian authorities are preparing to increase the age limit for military service from 40 to 49 and to drop the existing requirement for past military service to serve in tank and motorized infantry units.^[5] If true, the shift demonstrates the Kremlin’s increasing desperation for recruits to fill frontline units, regardless of their poor skills. Kotyenok echoed calls made by other milbloggers to reduce the health requirements for those serving in rear and support roles.^[6] Kotyenok additionally noted that while Russian recruits must have clean criminal records to serve, private military companies such as the Wagner Group will allow those with “mild misdemeanors” into service and that many of these low-level offenders have been mobilized into combat with Wagner in Donetsk and Luhansk. The Russian military leadership will likely continue efforts to expand the pool of eligible recruits, even at the cost of high-quality military personnel.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian military authorities are pursuing options to increase the available pool of eligible recruits to account for continued personnel losses in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces are continuing to fight for control of the Azot industrial plant and have destroyed all bridges between Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, likely to isolate the remaining Ukrainian defenders within the city from critical lines of communication.**
- **Russian forces continue to prepare for offensive operations southeast of Izyum and west of Lyman toward Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces are continuing offensive operations to the east of Bakhmut near the T1302 highway to cut Ukrainian lines of communication to Severodonetsk-Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations to push Ukrainian troops away from frontlines northeast of Kharkiv City.**
- **Ukrainian counterattacks have forced Russian troops on the Southern Axis to take up and strengthen defensive positions.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 14, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 13

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, George Barros, and Grace Mappes
June 13, 7:30pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Kremlin-sponsored outlet Izvestia published and quickly removed an appeal by the First Deputy Head of the Russian Presidential Administration Sergey Kirelenko for Russia to rebuild the Donbas on June 12 and blamed hackers for what they (likely falsely) claimed was a “fake publication.” Izvestia likely intended to save the article for a later date to set informational conditions for Russian annexation of Donbas. Kirelenko’s appeal stated that Russia will restore the Donbas regardless of high costs or if doing so lowers the standard of living in Russia.^[1] Izvestia blamed unknown hackers for publishing a “fake article,” but it is possible that hackers instead released an article Izvestia had prepared to publish at a later date. The Kremlin previously published and removed an article prematurely celebrating a Russian victory over Ukraine in late February and discussing the capture of Ukraine in past tense in anticipation of Ukraine’s capitulation during the first Russian-Ukrainian negotiations in Belarus.^[2] Unnamed Kremlin officials previously identified Kirelenko as the future head of a new Russian federal district, which would encompass Donbas, and occupied settlements in Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblasts.^[3]

Russia continues to deploy insufficiently prepared volunteer and reserve forces to reinforce its ongoing operations. Kremlin-sponsored outlet Izvestia released footage showing Russian artillery reservists undergoing training with old D-20 howitzers reportedly within 10 days of their deployment to Ukraine.^[4] The reservists focused on learning how to operate hand-held weapons, despite being reportedly only days away from deploying. Social media footage also showed Russian forces transporting Russian volunteer and reserve units with T-80BV tanks (a variant produced in 1985, as opposed to the modernized T-80 BVM operated by the 1st Guards Tank Army) and BMP-1 armored personnel carriers (which have largely been phased out in favor of the BMP-2) to Belgorod Oblast on June 9.^[5] Additional social media footage showed Russian forces transporting T-80BV tanks removed from storage in Moscow Oblast on June 9.^[6]

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces pushed Ukrainian defenders from the center of Severodonetsk and reportedly destroyed the remaining bridge from Severodonetsk to Lysychansk on June 13, but Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian forces are not encircled in the city.
- Russian forces carried out unsuccessful ground assaults in an attempt to sever Ukrainian ground lines of communications (GLOCs) near Popasna and Bakhmut.
- Russian forces launched unsuccessful offensive operations southeast of Izyum and north of Slovyansk, and are likely setting conditions for an assault on Siversk and northwestern Ukrainian GLOCs to Lysychansk.
- Russian forces are likely conducting a limited offensive directly northeast of Kharkiv City in a likely attempt to push Ukrainian forces out of artillery range of Russian rear areas and secured some successes.
- Russian and Ukrainian forces are engaging in ongoing fighting for Davydiv Brid in northwestern Kherson Oblast.
- Russian occupation authorities likely staged terrorist activity in Melitopol and Berdyansk for Russia Day on June 12.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 13, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 12

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Grace Mappes

June 12, 6:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces continue to struggle with generating additional combat-capable units. The UK Ministry of Defense reported on June 12 that Russian forces have been trying to produce more combat units by preparing to deploy third battalion tactical groups (BTGs) from some units over the last few weeks.^[1] The UK MoD noted that Russian brigades and regiments normally can generate two BTGs, but doing so leaves the parent units largely hollow shells. The UK MOD concluded that these third BTGs will likely be understaffed and rely on recruits and mobilized reservists. Their deployment will likely adversely impact the capacity of their parent units to regenerate their combat power for quite some time. BTGs generated in this fashion will not have the combat power of regular BTGs. It will be important not to overestimate Russian reserves produced in this way by counting these third BTGs as if they were normal BTGs.

Pro-Russian sources are continuing to spread disinformation to sow anxiety and resentment among the Ukrainian population. Russian Telegram channels reportedly began spreading a fake mobilization order on June 12 that they falsely attributed to the Ukrainian General Staff. The fake order called for the mobilization of all eligible Ukrainian women to report for duty by “June 31” (sic).

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued ground assaults in Severodonetsk and blew up bridges that connect Severodonetsk to Lysychansk across the Siverskyi Donets River in a likely attempt to cut Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) that run from Bakhmut to Lysychansk and Severodonetsk.**
- **Russian forces made incremental gains to the southeast of Izyum and will likely continue attempts to advance on Slovyansk from the northwest.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to push Ukrainian troops back from contested frontlines northeast of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces focused on maintaining defensive lines along the Southern Axis.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 12, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 11

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, and George Barros

June 11, 6:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Ukrainian intelligence assesses that the Russian military is extending its planning to fight a longer war, though Russian force generation and reserves likely remain poor. Deputy Head of the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Vadym Skibitsky stated the GUR received confirmed information that Russian forces have extended their war planning for the next 120 days, extending to October 2022.[1] Skibitsky said that Russian forces will adjust the plan depending on their successes in Donbas and noted that the Russian General Staff is modifying their invasion plans almost every month.[2] Skibitsky's statement likely indicates the Kremlin has, at a minimum, acknowledged it cannot achieve its objectives in Ukraine quickly and is further adjusting its military objectives in an attempt to correct the initial deficiencies in the invasion of Ukraine. Skibitsky also claimed that Russian forces have an additional 40 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) in reserve, after having already deployed 103 BTGs to Ukraine. This report is highly unlikely to mean Russian forces retain 40 full-strength and effective BTGs in Russia. At most, these "BTGs" are likely small collections of personnel cobbled together from other units. The Russian military is additionally unlikely to be holding such a significant portion of its force in reserve due to continuing manpower shortages in existing frontline units.

Ukrainian officials continued to increase their requests for Western offensive and defensive equipment, particularly regarding capabilities necessary to combat Russian artillery superiority.

Head of the Ukrainian Northern Operational Command Dmytro Krasilnikov reported that Ukrainian forces are experiencing a shortage in long-range artillery systems, while Russian artillery continues to overpower Ukrainian infantry. Ukrainian Advisor to Cabinet of Ministers Oleksandr Danylyuk stated that Russian forces adopted a new unspecified strategy that allows them to make more careful maneuvers.[3] Danylyuk added that Russian forces have more resources than Ukraine, which would prove advantageous in a protracted conflict. Severodonetsk Mayor Oleksandr Stryuk said that Ukrainian defenders need long-range artillery and air defense systems to strike against advancing Russian troops in Luhansk Oblast.[4] Ukrainian forces will need consistent Western support, particularly regarding artillery systems, as Russian numbers and resources take their toll on Ukrainian forces in increasingly positional warfare.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to conduct ground offensives within the Severodonetsk area, but Ukrainian defenders retain control of the industrial area of the city as of June 11.**
- **Russian forces likely resumed efforts to cut the T1303 Hirske-Lysyschansk highway and launched failed assaults on settlements along the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychank highway.**
- **Russian forces continued assaults on settlements southwest and southeast of Izyum in an effort to resume drives on Slovyansk.**
- **Ukrainian forces likely resumed counteroffensives northwest of Kherson City on June 11, south of their previous operations.**
- **Russian occupation officials distributed the first batch of Russian passports in Kherson City and Melitopol.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 11, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 10

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Mason Clark

June 10, 4:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Ukrainian officials are increasing the urgency of their requests for more-sophisticated Western-provided weapons systems amid reports of growing Russian artillery superiority. Several Western media outlets reported in the last 48 hours that Ukrainian military and government officials are increasingly highlighting the fact that Ukrainian troops are trapped in an “artillery war” on critical frontlines and are at a distinct disadvantage in terms of artillery systems.[1] Deputy Head of the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Vadym Skibitsky stated that Russian troops possess 10 to 15 artillery pieces to every one Ukrainian artillery piece and that Ukrainian forces have almost completely exhausted their artillery ammunition.[2] Considering the current prevalence of protracted positional battles, especially in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area, Ukrainian forces urgently need fresh supplies of artillery systems. As Ukrainian forces use the last of their stocks of Soviet-era weapon systems and munitions, they will require consistent Western support to transition to new supply chains of ammunition and key artillery systems. Effective artillery will be increasingly decisive in the largely static fighting in eastern Ukraine. **Russian military authorities continue to struggle with force generation and are facing the consequences of aggressive forced mobilization efforts.** Ukraine’s Security Service (SBU) claimed they captured a new group of Russian prisoners of war who reportedly were recruited through a private military company and told they were going to be providing security services but were instead sent to the frontline in Luhansk.[3] The Ukrainian General Staff similarly reported that units comprised of forcibly mobilized personnel are refusing to participate in combat in the Donbas due to high losses.[4] The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) cited intercepted phone calls and claimed that Russian soldiers are refusing to fight and are being threatened with prosecution—despite their lack of equipment and weapons within their units.[5] Such reports are consistent with previous reports that Russian forced mobilization efforts are self-destructive and may result in mounting discontent and declining morale and discipline.[6]

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian officials are increasing the urgency of their requests for Western weapons systems due to Russia’s artillery superiority.**
- **Russian forces are continuing ground assaults within Severodonetsk but have yet to secure full control of the city as of June 10.**
- **Russian forces are preparing to renew offensive operations toward Slovyansk and made minor gains to the north of the city.**
- **Russian forces are continuing efforts to cut the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway and conducting assaults on settlements near the highway.**
- **Russian troops reportedly took control of the Kinburn Spit in the northern Black Sea, which will allow them to exert further control of the Black Sea coast.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 10, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 9

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Mason Clark

June 9, 6:45 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces are continuing to deploy outdated military equipment to Ukraine to replace losses. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on June 9 that Russian forces are mining Kherson Oblast with mines from the 1950s to defend against recent Ukrainian counterattacks in northwestern Kherson Oblast.^[1] The GUR stated that Russian forces moved these mines from Russia's Rostov Oblast to the Kherson area despite the fact the mines were meant to be destroyed. The GUR claimed that some of the mines detonated during the transportation processes and killed Russian sappers from the 49th Combined Arms Army. The GUR's report is consistent with previous statements that Russian forces are moving old and obsolete equipment to Ukraine to make up for equipment losses, including deploying T-62 tanks to the Melitopol area and pulling MLRS and 152mm howitzers from storage in Irkutsk, Siberia.^[2]

Russian military command continues to face pervasive issues with force generation. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian officials in Luhansk Oblast have had to reduce their mobilization efforts due to widespread protests against aggressive mobilization efforts that have taken a toll on the labor market in Luhansk.^[3] Attacks on Russian military recruitment offices are additionally continuing.^[4] An unidentified assailant threw a Molotov cocktail at the military commissariat in Vladivostok, which is the eighteenth such reported attack on Russian territory since the beginning of the war. As Russian officials escalate mobilization efforts over the background of continued losses in Ukraine, they will continue to run the risk of instigating public dissent and pushback against such recruitment practices.

Key Takeaways

- Russian officials are increasingly taking over governmental positions in occupied Ukrainian territory, advancing the Kremlin's likely efforts to annex occupied areas of Ukraine into Russia as an okrug (federal district).
- Russian forces continued to fight for the Azot industrial zone in Severodonetsk under the cover of heavy artillery fire.
- Russian forces made marginal gains north of Slovyansk but are likely to face difficulties assaulting the city itself because of the tactical challenges posed by crossing the Siverskyi Donets River.
- Russian forces made incremental advances to the east of Bakhmut and will continue efforts to cut Ukrainian lines of communication to the northeast of Bakhmut.
- Russian forces are likely engaged in limited fighting along occupied frontiers in northern Kharkiv Oblast.
- Russian forces continue to focus on strengthening defensive lines along the Southern Axis and are intensifying ground attacks in northeastern Zaporizhia Oblast with the support of troop and equipment rotations.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 9, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 8

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros
June 8, 6:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

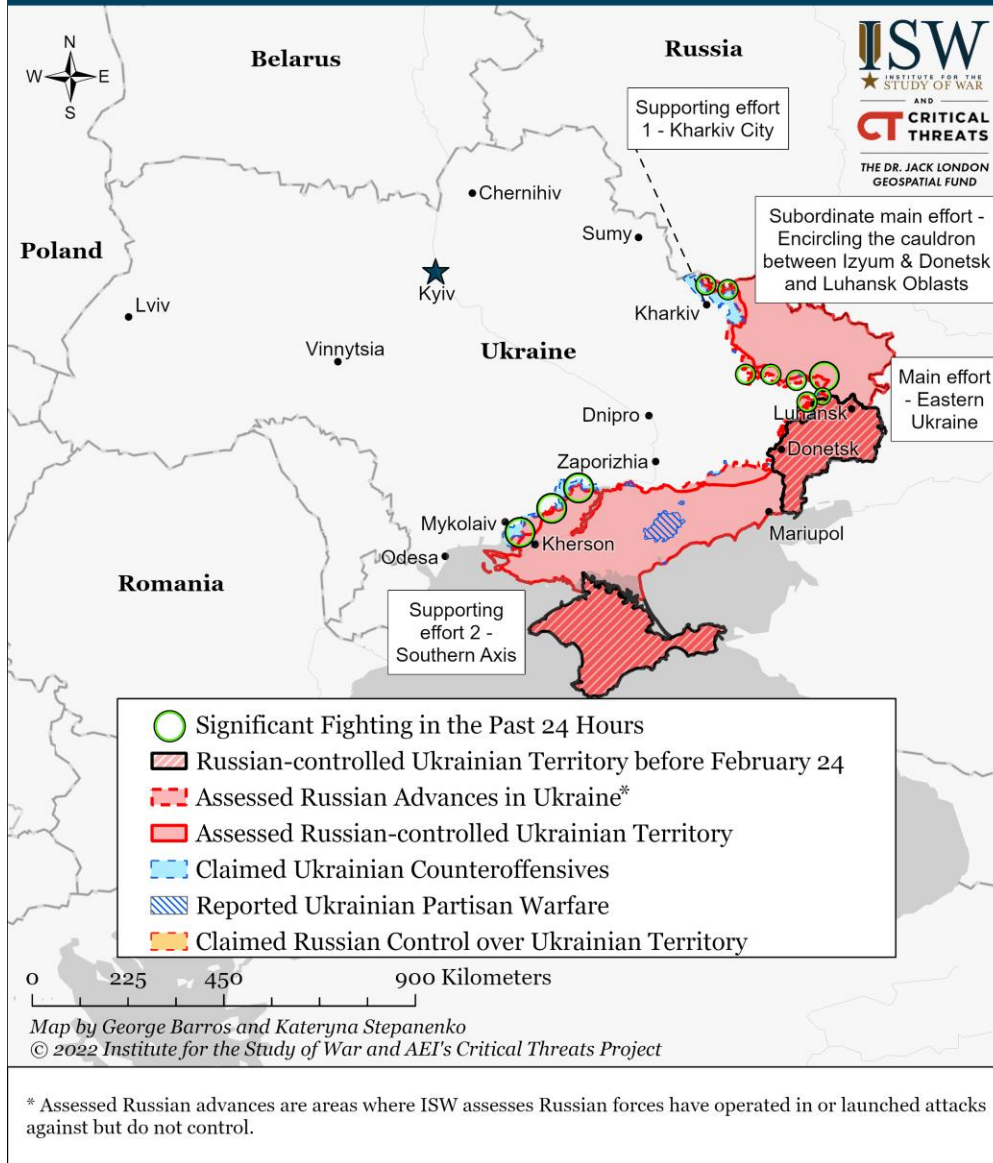
Russian forces are escalating the use of psychological and information operations to damage the morale of Ukrainian soldiers. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on June 8 that Russian forces are sending threatening messages to the personal devices of Ukrainian servicemen calling on them to betray their service oaths, lay down their arms, surrender, or defect to Russia.[1] The GUR reported that Russian forces are sending messages on a variety of platforms including SMS, Telegram, Viber, Signal, and WhatsApp and that the messages use location information to threaten to harm Ukrainian soldiers or their family members. Ukrainian military expert Dmytro Snegirov additionally noted that Russian propagandists are conducting informational and psychological campaigns to spoil the morale of Ukrainian troops by disseminating information that the battle for Severodonetsk will become the “next Mariupol.”[2] These information and psychological attacks likely seek to lower the morale of Ukrainian servicemen as operations on multiple axes of advance continue to generate high casualties on both the Ukrainian and Russian sides.

Russian military commanders continue to face force generation challenges. The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Russian military enlistment offices in Crimea are falsifying the results of mandatory medical exams administered during the summer conscription period to maximize the number of recruits.[3] Russian police also arrested a man who threw a molotov cocktail and set fire to a local Crimean administration building in protest of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, likely indicating growing discontent with Russian war efforts in Crimea.[4] ISW has previously reported that forced mobilization in the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) is exacerbating social tensions and sparking protests in Donbas.[5] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that unspecified elements of the 106th and 76th Guards Airborne Assault Divisions refused to participate in combat in Luhansk Oblast and returned to Russia. The 76th Guards Airborne Assault Division previously participated in assaults on Kyiv, Izyum, and Popasna, which has likely led to the demoralization of troops.[6]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued assaults against Ukrainian positions in Severodonetsk. Russian forces simultaneously seek to outflank Ukrainian positions in the region to avoid the necessity of making an opposed crossing of the Siverskyi Donets river.**
- **Russian forces are continuing operations around Sviatohirsk and west of Lyman to link up with operations southeast of Izyum and drive on Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces are intensifying their operations in northwestern Kherson Oblast in response to recent Ukrainian counterattacks.**
- **Russian forces in Zaporizhia Oblast are focusing ground and artillery attacks near the Zaporizhia-Donetsk Oblast border and likely are seeking to strengthen control of the highway between Vasylivka-Orikhiv and Huliapole to support operations in northeast Zaporizhia.**
- **Russian-backed occupation authorities are attempting to set conditions for the political integration of occupied areas into the Russian Federation but are likely acting independently and in an incoherent manner due to the lack of a unifying occupation authority.**
- **Russian forces intensified psychological and information operations to degrade Ukrainian morale.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 8, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 7

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros
June 7, 6:45 pm ET

[Click here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian forces continued offensive operations in several locations in eastern Ukraine but did not secure any confirmed gains in ground assaults on June 7. Russian forces have likely captured most of Severodonetsk, but ISW cannot confirm the exact control of terrain within the city.[1] Russian forces additionally redeployed troops east of Bakhmut to renew offensives to secure access to highways northeast of Bakhmut and threaten Ukrainian lines of communication.[2] Russian troops north of Slovyansk will likely seek to advance toward Slovyansk and Kramatorsk from positions north of the city.[3] Russian forces on the Southern Axis are reportedly redeploying away from Zaporizhia Oblast toward Kherson Oblast, likely in order to support Russian defensive positions that have been threatened by Ukrainian counterattacks along the Mykolaiv-Kherson Oblast border south of Davydiv Brid.[4] **Members of the Russian military community are accusing Ukrainian forces of escalating artillery attacks on Russian rear areas in a likely attempt to dissuade further Western support to the Ukrainian military.** Former FSB agent Igor Girkin (also known as Strelkov) accused Ukrainian troops of perpetrating “terrorist attacks” against residential areas of Donetsk City, Horlivka, and Makiivka.[5] A Russian source additionally accused Ukrainian forces of firing on Shyroka Balka, Kherson Oblast.[6] Ukrainian social media users denied the claims and stated that they are likely false-flag attempts to spoil Western opinion of the Ukrainian military and halt military aid to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.[7]

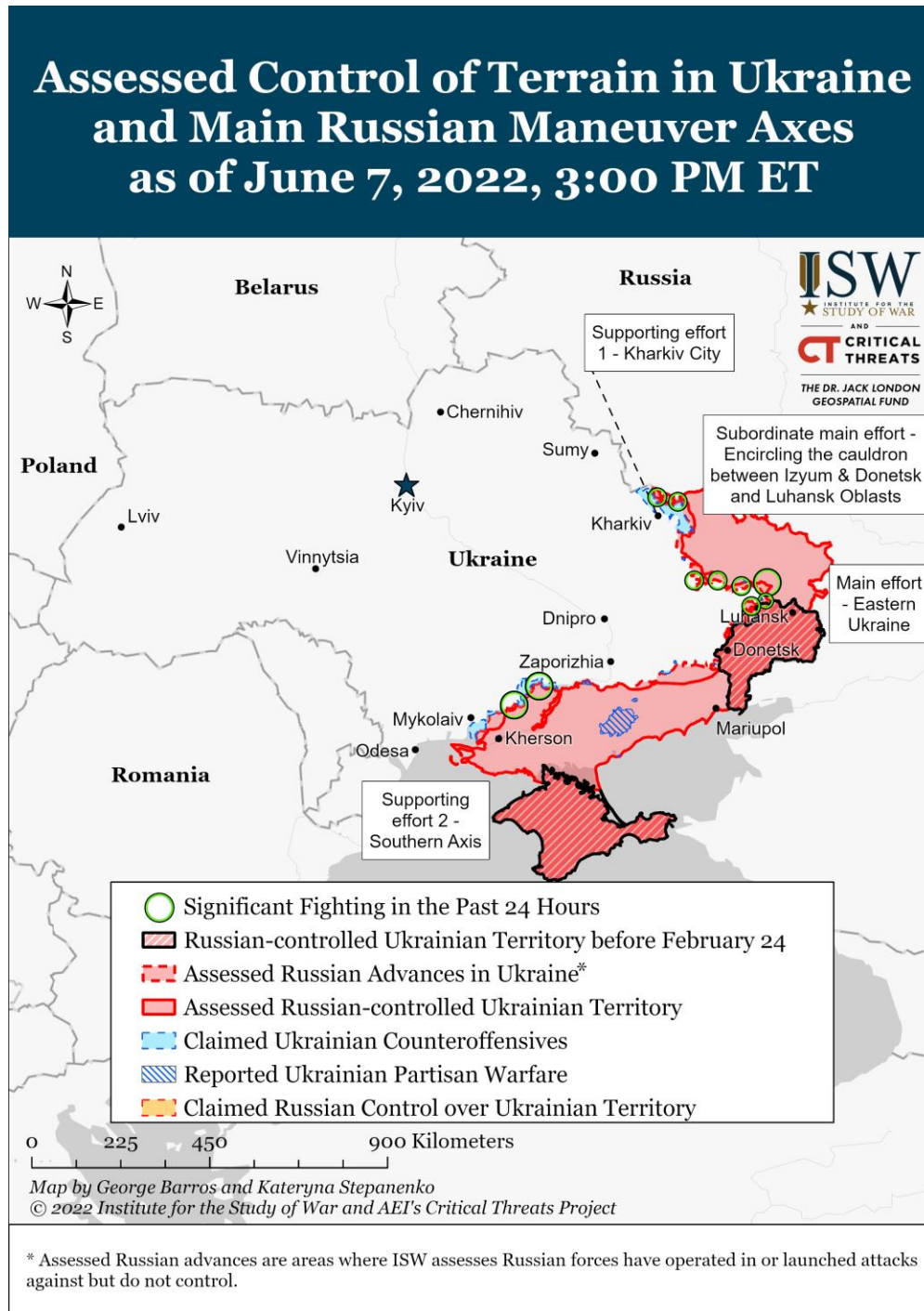
The Kremlin’s efforts to censor information about deceased military personnel and ongoing forced mobilization within the DNR and LNR are reportedly exacerbating domestic tensions and opposition to the war in Russia. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that the Kremlin assigned lawyers and psychologists to convince families of personnel of the sunken cruiser Moskva to refrain from disclosing any information regarding the deaths of their relatives in an effort to crush rising social tensions in Russia.[8] The GUR stated that the Kremlin is threatening to nullify financial compensation to the families of Moskva crew members if they publicly discuss the sinking of the cruiser, resulting in some relatives refusing to meet with Black Sea Fleet commanders in Sevastopol in protest. Ukrainian media sources separately reported that the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) altered mobilization protocols and is now promising compensation for wounded and deceased personnel due to DNR servicemen rioting at the frontlines.[9]

Domestic Russian complaints about the maltreatment and lack of preparation among Russian combat forces are likely prompting the Kremlin to take rhetorical steps to curb discontent. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu stated that new conscripts during the summer training period will be trained with specific attention to lessons learned so far in Ukraine during a meeting with the National Defense Management Center (NDCC) (the supreme command center of the Russian Armed Forces and Defense Ministry) on June 7. Shoigu added that summer conscripts will learn battlefield first aid, likely responding to criticisms by members of the Russian military community of poor tactics and lack of first aid acumen among Russian soldiers.[10] However, the Russian military is unlikely to properly train and equip Russian conscripts rushed to the front as replacements and likely primarily seeks to mollify public discontent. Former DNR Security Minister and milblogger Alexander Khodakovsky claimed that he asked the DNR military command to move exhausted and demoralized proxy conscripts to auxiliary tasks away from the line of contact but to no avail.[11]

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces have likely established control over the majority of the residential sector of Severodonetsk and conducted assaults against Ukrainian positions in the industrial zone in the past 24 hours. The operational environment within the city remains fluid.
- Russian forces continued efforts to advance on Slovyansk southeast from the Izyum area and west from Lyman, attempting to break through Ukrainian defenses that have halted most direct frontal assaults from Izyum.
- Russian forces are likely attempting to reinforce their operations in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area from both the Toshkivka-Ustynivka area in the south and Kupyansk from the northwest.
- Russian forces began withdrawing troops from positions in Zaporizhia Oblast, likely either to rotate damaged units into rear areas or to reinforce Russian defenses in northwestern Kherson Oblast, though ISW cannot currently confirm the destination of these forces.
- Russian forces failed to regain advanced positions on the western (now Ukrainian-occupied) bank of the Ihulets River on June 7.
- Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that Russian forces restored transit connections between newly occupied cities and Crimea.

- Russian occupation authorities continue to face challenges suppressing Ukrainian resistance and finding partisan supporters despite increasingly draconian occupation measures and attempts to bribe Ukrainian civilians.



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 6

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

June 6, 7:15 pm ET

[Click here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

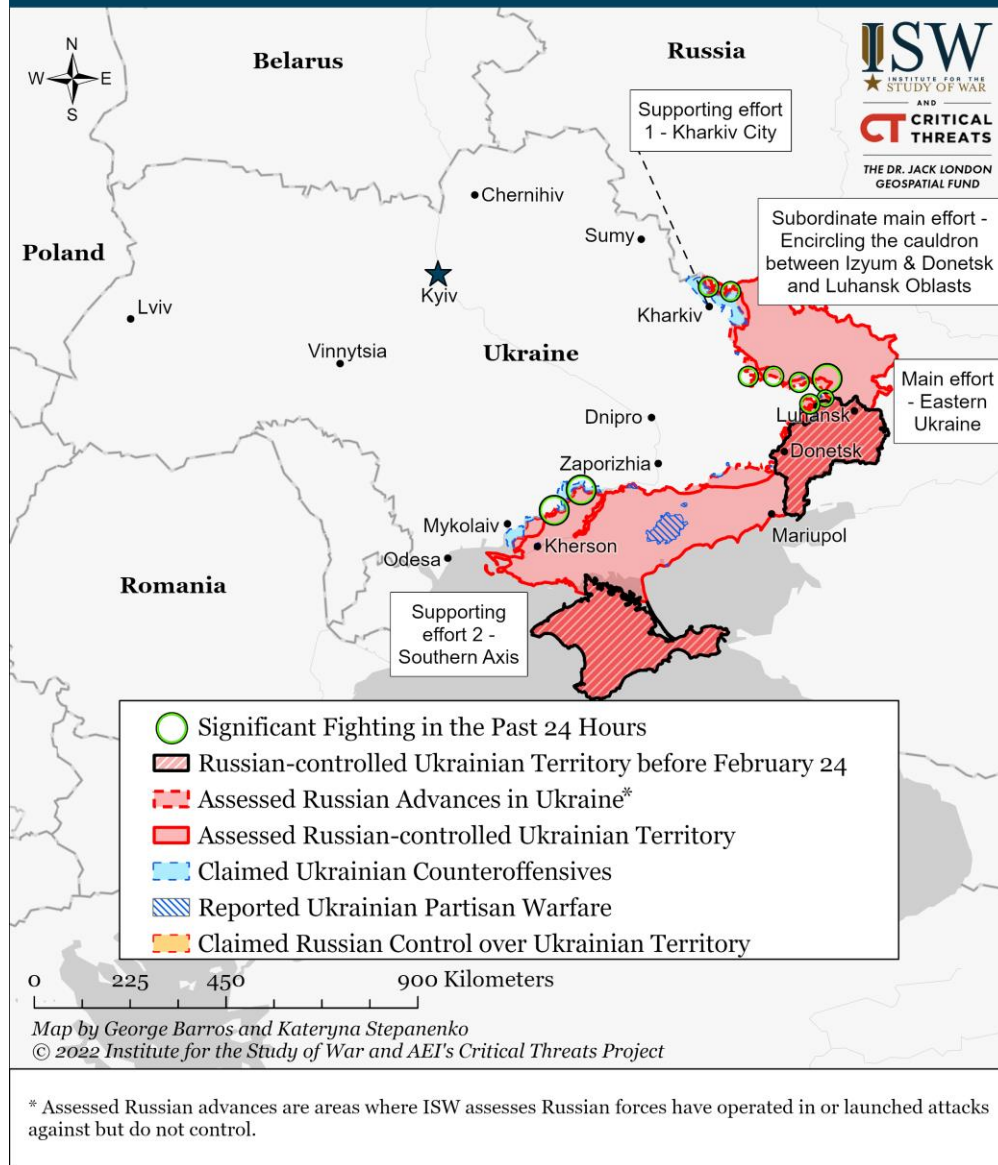
The nature of urban combat in Severodonetsk is likely obfuscating reports of control of terrain within the city, though Russian forces likely retain control over much of the city. Head of the Luhansk Regional State Administration Serhiy Haidai claimed on June 5 that Ukrainian forces managed to retake large parts of Severodonetsk and push Russian forces to the outskirts of the city during successful urban counterattacks.[1] Ukrainian journalist Yuri Butusov, however, denied Haidai's claims on June 5 and claimed that Ukrainian forces only control the Azot industrial sector of Severodonetsk. Haidai amended his claims on June 6 and reported that the situation in Severodonetsk has deteriorated significantly, adding that Ukrainian forces were indeed fighting within the Azot industrial site on June 6.[2] The reason for Haidai and Butusov's conflicting reports is unclear, and heavy urban fighting is ongoing in the city.

Ukrainian naval forces are challenging Russian dominance over the northwestern part of the Black Sea and claimed to be preventing Russian warships from operating close to the shoreline. The Ukrainian Navy reported on June 6 that they had succeeded in pushing a grouping of the Russian Black Sea Fleet more than 100 km away from the Ukrainian coast but did not specify a timeframe for this statement.[3] The report additionally stated that Russian naval forces have subsequently had to change their tactics in the Black Sea and are relying more heavily on Bal and Bastion coastal defense systems in occupied Kherson and Crimea rather than seaborne air defenses. The UK Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces have been strengthening their air defense assets on Snake Island, and the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense reported that Russian forces deployed additional S-300 air defense battalions to Crimea.[4] Taken together, these reports suggest that Ukrainian naval pressure and anti-ship missiles—likely including those provided by the UK and other states—have forced the Russian grouping in the northwestern Black Sea to rely more on coastal and air defense as they are pushed away from the Ukrainian shoreline. Ukraine will likely attempt to leverage these successes to alleviate the economic pressure of the Russian blockade on Ukraine's ports and seek additional economic support from the west, including possibly opening up new routes for international aid to Ukraine.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces likely retain control over most of Severodonetsk as of June 6, though the exact situation in the city remains unclear. Control of terrain is likely changing hands frequently.
- Russian forces in the Izyum area did not make any confirmed advances, while forces advancing west from Lyman secured minor gains.
- Russian forces continued unsuccessful attempts to sever Ukrainian lines of communication northeast of Bakhmut.
- Limited and localized Ukrainian counterattacks on June 5 forced Russian troops to focus on holding defensive lines north of Kharkiv City on June 6.
- Russian occupation authorities are advancing efforts to issue Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens and cement their control over occupied territories.
- The Ukrainian Navy claimed to have pushed the Russian Black Sea Fleet more than 100 km from the Ukrainian coast, likely to reduce the pressure of the Russian blockade on Ukraine's southern ports.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 6, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 5

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

June 6, 5:15 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Ukrainian forces continued to conduct limited and localized but successful counterattacks against Russian positions throughout Ukraine on June 5, including retaking large areas of Severodonetsk—the city in Luhansk Oblast the Kremlin has concentrated the majority of its forces on capturing.

A Russian Telegram channel claimed that Ukrainian troops launched a counterattack north of Kharkiv City, indicating that Ukrainian forces continue to pressure Russian defensive lines near the Russian border.[1] Ukrainian forces are likely seeking to leverage the continued Russian focus on Severodonetsk to conduct counterattacks on other axes of advance. Even as Russian forces continue to pour equipment and troops into the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area, Ukrainian forces have conducted a successful counterattack in Severodonetsk in the last 48 hours and pushed Russian troops back to the eastern outskirts of the city and out of southern settlements.[2] Ukrainian counteroffensive pressure will likely continue to draw the attention of Russian forces to Luhansk Oblast and therefore leave vulnerabilities in Russian defensive efforts in Kharkiv Oblast and along the Southern Axis. The ability of Ukrainian forces to successfully counterattack in Severodonetsk, the Kremlin's current priority area of operations, further indicates the declining combat power of Russian forces in Ukraine.

Ukrainian forces reportedly killed Russian Major General Roman Kutuzov on June 5. Russian Telegram channels reported that Kutuzov was killed near Mykolaivka, Luhansk Oblast (near Popasna) on June 5.[3] Kutuzov likely commanded the Donetsk People's Republic's 1st Army Corps at the time of his death, though ISW cannot confirm his exact position.[4] Some sources reported that Kutuzov commanded the 5th Combined Arms Army (CAA) at the time of his death, but we assess this is likely incorrect—Kutuzov served as acting commander of the 5th CAA from 2017 to 2019, and Major General Alexei Vladimirovich Podilov currently commands the 5th CAA.[5] High-level Russian commanders have taken remarkably high losses during combat in Ukraine, and will likely continue to do so as the Russian command continues to deploy military leadership directly to the frontline. Kutuzov's death has not yet been confirmed but would be at least the seventh death of a general in Ukraine since the beginning of the war.[6]

Russian forces conducted their first missile strike against Kyiv in over a month on June 5. Advisor to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense Vadym Denysenko stated that Russian forces fired five X-22 cruise missiles from a Tu-95 aircraft at Kyiv from the direction of the Caspian Sea that hit the Darnytsia Rail Car Repair Plant on the outskirts of Kyiv.[7] The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that this strike targeted T-72 tanks supplied to Ukraine by other Eastern European countries, but images of the target area confirm that the missiles hit the Darnytsia plant.[8] It is unclear if Russian forces intended to strike foreign-provided Ukrainian tanks and missed, or if the Kremlin is attempting to obfuscate its intended target. This attack on Kyiv likely indicates that Russian forces are continuing to target Ukrainian infrastructure in non-critical areas of Ukraine in order to disrupt Ukrainian logistics as Russian forces take considerable losses in Donbas.

Russian military bloggers continued to reckon with overarching struggles in Russian force generation on June 5. Russian milblogger Alexander Khodakovsky accused “screamers in the guise of patriots” of hypocritically calling for general mobilization while at the same time discrediting the Russian military leadership and driving away those who would voluntarily take up arms for Russia.[9] Khodakovsky blamed the pervasive public discourse on general mobilization for making people overthink and subsequently become less willing to enter military service, thereby forcing Russian military command closer to actually needing to announce general mobilization. Khodakovsky suggested that this discourse is setting Russia up for a long war in Ukraine and that Russian authorities have been positioned to take the blame for losses. Russian war journalist Alexander Sladkov claimed that the Russian grouping in Ukraine is an “exclusively professional army” not staffed by conscripts, while simultaneously calling for the removal of health requirements for rear and combat specialties in order to mobilize those who should be medically disqualified.[10] These and other comments by Russian military specialists indicate the Russian military community is increasingly aware of issues in sustaining mobilization efforts and different actors are seeking to apportion blame as Russian operations continue to stall.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian counterattacks in Severodonetsk recaptured large parts of the city and forced Russian troops out of the southern suburbs of the city.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to converge on Sloviansk from the southeast of Izyum and west of Lyman but remain unlikely to make notable advances around Sloviansk due to their continued prioritization of Severodonetsk.**

- Ukrainian troops reportedly conducted limited and localized counterattacks north of Kharkiv City.
- Russian forces continued to hold their defensive lines and fire at Ukrainian positions along the Southern Axis.
- Ukrainian forces likely killed Russian Major General Roman Kutuzov near Popasna.



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 4

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, and George Barros

June 4, 6:00 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Ukrainian forces are successfully slowing down Russian operations to encircle Ukrainian positions in Luhansk Oblast as well as Russian frontal assaults in Severodonetsk through prudent and effective local counterattacks in Severodonetsk and their defense of the western Siverskyi Donets riverbank. Ukrainian officials reported on June 3 that Ukrainian defenders pushed back against Russian advances in Severodonetsk and are actively hindering Russian advances on Lysychansk from the southwest.[1] Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai disagreed with the UK Defense Ministry forecast on June 3 that Russian forces will seize the remaining 10% of the oblast in the next two weeks, claiming that Ukrainian forces have enough reinforcements and equipment to conduct further counterattacks and defend their positions.[2] Haidai noted that Russian forces wrongfully believe in their own successes, enabling Ukrainian defenders to inflict high losses against unsuspecting Chechen units. Pro-Russian milblogger Voenkor Kotyenok Z claimed that Russian forces are unlikely to break through Ukrainian defenses in Lysychansk from Severodonetsk (through continued frontal assaults and an opposed crossing of the Siverskyi Donetsk River) and will likely need to complete the drive from Popasna if they hope to capture Lysychansk.[3] Voenkor Kotyenok Z claimed that Ukrainian forces could prevent Russian river crossings from Severodonetsk and highlighted that Russian forces have not yet secured access to two key highways to Lysychansk.

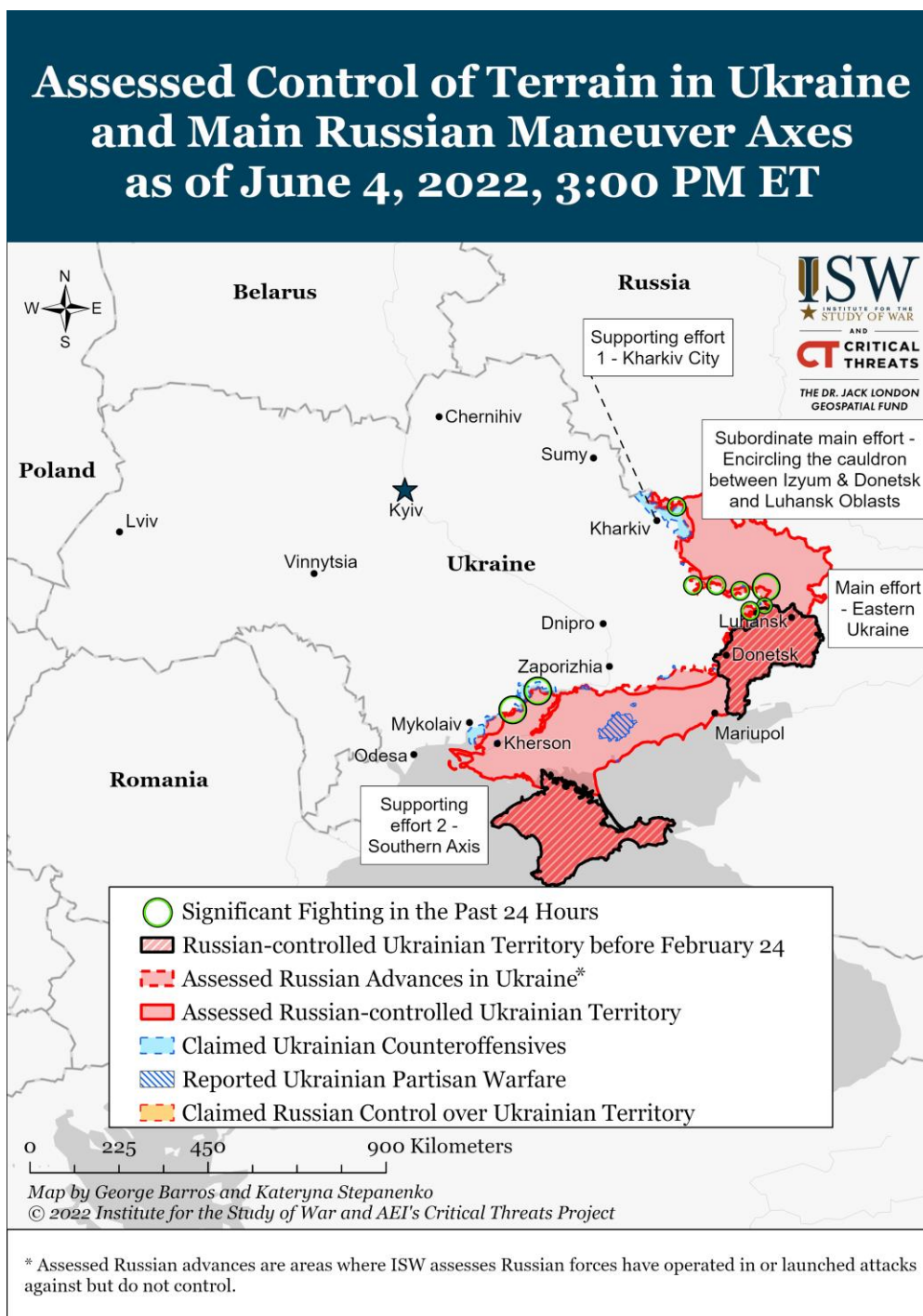
The Ukrainian government and military are furthermore discussing the battle of Severodonetsk in increasingly confident terms and are likely successfully blunting the Russian military's major commitment of reserves to the grinding battle for the city. While Russian forces may still be able to capture Severodonetsk and Lysychansk and Ukrainian forces are likely more degraded than Haidai's statements imply, Ukrainian defenses remain strong in this pivotal theater. The Russian military has concentrated all of its available resources on this single battle to make only modest gains. The Ukrainian military contrarily retains the flexibility and confidence to not only conduct localized counterattacks elsewhere in Ukraine (such as north of Kherson) but conduct effective counterattacks into the teeth of Russian assaults in Severodonetsk that reportedly retook 20% of the city in the last 24 hours. The Ukrainian government's confidence in directly stating its forces can hold Severodonetsk for more than two weeks and willingness to conduct local counterattacks, rather than strictly remaining on the defensive, is a marked shift from Ukrainian statements as recently as May 28 that Ukrainian forces might withdraw from Severodonetsk to avoid encirclement.[4]

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov reiterated on June 3 that Russia will continue its "special military operation" in Ukraine until Russia achieves all of its objectives.[5] Peskov noted that Russia has already "liberated" many settlements since the start of the operation. Kremlin officials have begun steadily returning to their original claims about the successes of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in contrast to previous statements in late May explaining the slow pace of the war.[6] Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu also claimed on June 3 that Russian forces are adopting new unspecified tasks to accelerate the progress of the war.[7] The Kremlin is likely setting conditions to announce some sort of victory in eastern Ukraine while preparing for a protracted war. The Kremlin has not abandoned its maximalist political goals for Ukraine even though it has been forced to revise downward its immediate military objectives.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces conducted successful local counterattacks in Severodonetsk and Russian progress in direct assaults on the city and wider operations to encircle it remain slow. Ukrainian defenses in eastern Ukraine remain effective.**
- **Russian forces launched a series of unsuccessful offensive operations southwest of Izyum and in the Lyman area.**
- **Russian forces continued to defend previously occupied positions around Kharkiv City and launched missile and artillery strikes against Ukrainian defenders.**
- **Russian forces did not attempt to launch assaults on settlements in Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblast but continued to fire at Ukrainian positions throughout southern Ukraine.**

- The Kremlin faces rising partisan activity in southern Ukraine despite Russian efforts to restrict movement and telecommunications access.
- Ukrainian officials are continuing negotiations for a prisoner exchange of the captured Mariupol defenders.



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 3

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, and George Barros

June 3, 7:30 pm ET

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu claimed that Russian forces will “accelerate” the “special military operation” in Ukraine in a meeting with Chechen Leader Ramzan Kadyrov on June 3, though Russian forces are unlikely to be able to do so. Kadyrov said that Shoigu has “identified new tasks” that will improve the effectiveness of Russian offensive maneuvers and improve Russian tactics.[1] Kadyrov did not specify which tasks Russian forces will undertake to speed up their pace. Shoigu previously claimed on May 24 that Russian forces were making slow progress in eastern Ukraine to avoid civilian casualties.[2] In a retrospective on the 100th day of the war, the UK Defense Ministry stated that Russian forces will likely establish control over Luhansk Oblast in the next two weeks, though only at significant further cost.[3] The UK Defense Ministry further noted that Russian forces on all other axes have gone over to defensive operations to concentrate all available forces in Severodonetsk, and stated Russia will need to commit sizable investment of manpower and equipment—that it will be unable to generate quickly, if at all—to advance beyond Luhansk Oblast.

A Russian milblogger published a lengthy message on June 3 claiming that nearly the entire 35th Combined Arms Army has been destroyed in Izyum due to incompetent Russian commanders. A Russian milblogger under the pseudonym Boytsovyi Kot Murz said that Russian commanders did not account for combat challenges in the Izyum woods, leading to significant losses in the 64th and 38th Separate Guard Motor Rifle Brigades, which he reported now have less than 100 servicemen in total.[4] Boytsovyi Kot Murz claimed that Russian commanders failed to provide necessary equipment to units fighting in wooded terrain and did not repair Russian heavy artillery in a timely manner. Russian forces also reportedly lacked effective communication with command centers and relied on messengers due to the shortage of encrypted phones. Boytsovyi Kot Murz noted that the lack of communications between Russian units and commanders allowed Ukrainian forces to strike Russian advanced positions with drones. Russian private military company servicemen from Wagner also refused to participate in combat, leading to a significant lack of advances on the Izyum axis. While ISW cannot independently confirm these reports, they are consistent with previous reports of Russian operations and high casualties on the Izyum axis.

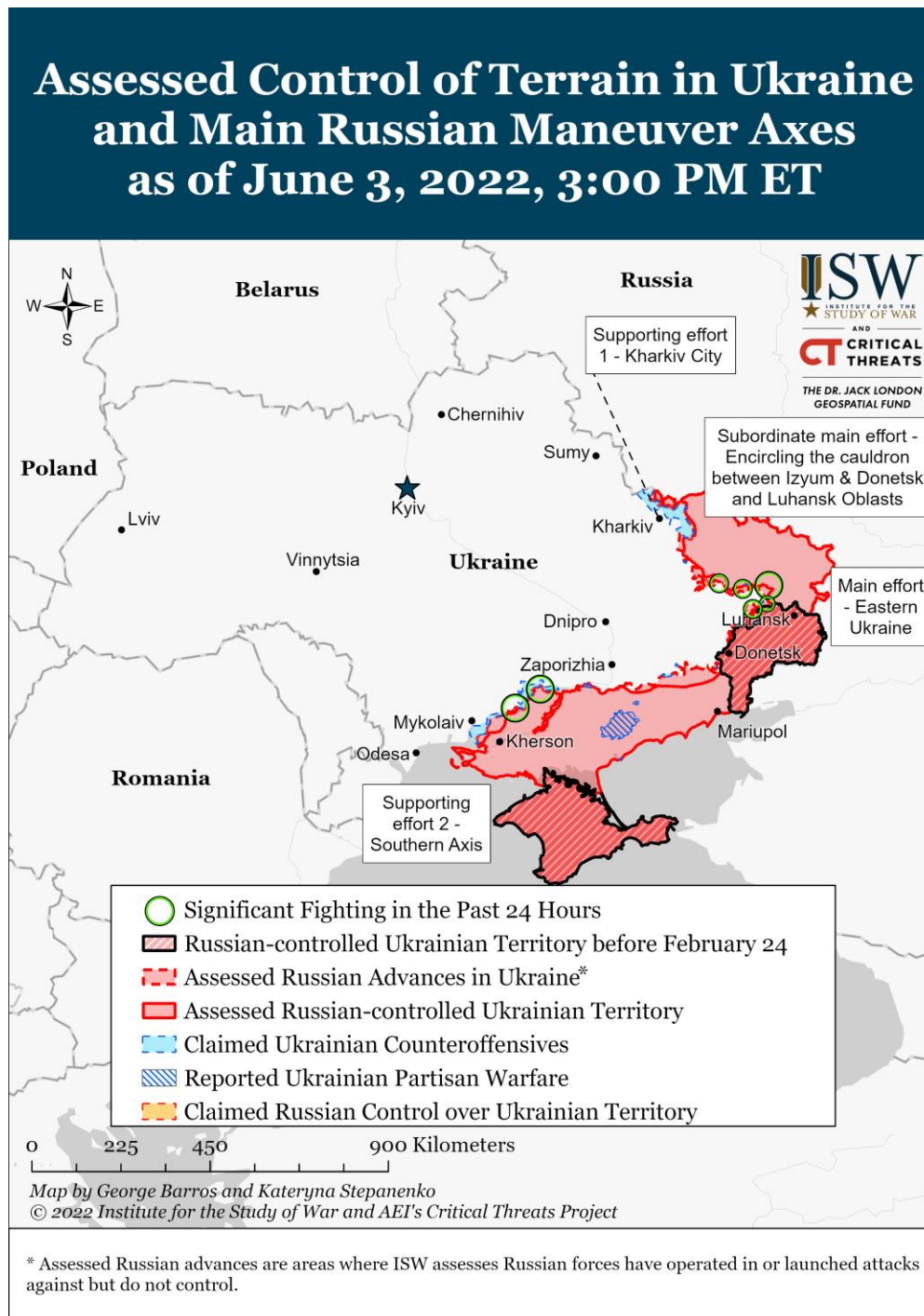
Russian and proxy forces reportedly have not sufficiently prepared frontline units with medical supplies, leading to abysmal medical care. Boytsovyi Kot Murz criticized the Russian Defense Ministry for failing to prepare medical equipment and field hospitals for wounded servicemen.[5] Russian commanders reportedly failed to learn lessons from the lack of medical equipment during the Battle of Debaltseve in 2015 and are repeating similar mistakes. Boytsovyi Kot Murz claimed that Russian forces do not provide frontline troops with high pressure bandages and other supplies necessary to address limb injuries in time. Boytsovyi Kot Murz compared expired and underprepared Russian first aid kits to higher quality Ukrainian supplies and claimed that Russian forces do not have volunteer support that could address the shortages in military equipment. Boytsovyi Kot Murz noted that only Russian infantry, that he claimed has been defeated, had necessary medical training—while newly recruited reservists are incapable of providing first aid. Boytsovyi Kot Murz said that Russian medics are conducting an unnecessary number of limb amputations due to the lack medical equipment provided by the Russian Defense Ministry. These claims are consistent with past reports of poor Russian medical care in frontline units, and these conditions are likely a major contributing factor to Russian demoralization and the growing refusal of servicemen to return to frontline units.

Ukrainian forces report that Russian electronic warfare (EW) units are increasingly threatening Ukrainian air reconnaissance in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces are increasingly jamming all possible signals and hindering Ukrainian drone operations.[6] The Ukrainian General Staff has previously reported that Russian forces intensified EW operations in Donbas, likely in an effort to obstruct Ukrainian aerial reconnaissance and drone strikes on Russian units.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces conducted unsuccessful assaults southeast and southwest of Izyum and west of Lyman but remain unlikely to secure major advances towards Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces made minor gains in the eastern part of Severodonetsk, but Ukrainian forces continues to launch localized counterattacks in Severodonetsk and its outskirts.**

- Russian forces did not attempt to launch assaults on Avdiivka.
- Russian forces failed to regain lost positions in northeastern Kherson Oblast and continued to defend previously occupied positions.
- Russian occupation authorities began issuing Russian passports in Kherson City and Melitopol, though they continue to face challenges establishing societal control over occupied territories and ending Ukrainian partisan actions.



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 2

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, and George Barros

June 2, 6:15pm ET

Russian forces continued to make incremental, grinding, and costly progress in eastern Ukraine on June 2.

Russian troops continued operations to capture Severodonetsk and further operations to capture Lysychansk. Russian military leadership will likely use the capture of these two cities to claim they have “liberated” all of Luhansk Oblast before turning to Donetsk Oblast but Russian forces are unlikely to have the forces necessary to take substantial territory in Donetsk Oblast after suffering further losses around Severodonetsk. Russian forces are evidently limited by terrain in the Donbas and will continue to face challenges crossing the Siverskyi Donets River to complete the encirclement of Severodonetsk-Lysychansk and make further advances westward of Lyman towards Slovyansk via Raihorodok.[1]

Russian military leadership continues to experience complications with sufficient force

generation and maintaining the morale of mobilized personnel. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Donetsk People’s Republic’s (DNR) 1st Army Corps, under Russia’s 8th Combined Arms Army, is conducting forced mobilization in occupied areas of Donetsk Oblast.[2] Russian forced mobilization is highly unlikely to generate meaningful combat power and will exacerbate low morale and poor discipline in Russian and proxy units. The 113th Regiment of the DNR posted a video appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin on June 2 wherein forcibly-mobilized soldiers complain they have spent the entire war on the frontline in Kherson without food or medicine, and that mobilization committees did not conduct requisite medical screenings and admitted individuals whose medical conditions should have disqualified them from service.[3] Ukraine’s Main Intelligence Directorate additionally released an intercepted phone conversation wherein DNR soldiers similarly complained that physically unfit individuals were forced into service and that mobilized units are experiencing mass drunkenness and general disorder.[4] Russian forces are additionally struggling to successfully rotate servicemen in and out of combat. Spokesperson for the Odesa Military Administration Maksym Marchenko stated that 30 to 40% of Russian personnel that rotated out of Ukraine refused to return, forcing Russian commanders to send unprepared and unmotivated units back into combat.[5] This is consistent with complaints made by DNR servicemen that rotation practices are contributing to poor morale and dissatisfaction within units that have been forcibly mobilized.[6]

Russian occupation authorities continue to face challenges establishing permanent societal control in newly occupied Ukrainian territories.

The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian occupational administrations “are [only] created on paper” and are incapable of controlling local populations, enforcing the use of the Russian ruble, or conducting bureaucratic processes.[7] The Ukrainian Resistance Center noted that Ukrainian civilians welcome partisan activity that systematically sabotages Russian occupation rule.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian operations to advance on Slovyansk from the southeast of Izyum and west of Lyman continue to make little progress and are unlikely to do so in the coming days, as Russian forces continue to prioritize Severodonetsk at the expense of other axes of advance.**
- **Russian forces continued assaults against Severodonetsk and Lysychansk in order to claim full control of Luhansk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces made incremental advances around Avdiivka.**
- **Ukrainian counteroffensives in northwestern Kherson Oblast pushed Russian forces to the eastern bank of the Inhulets River and will likely continue to disrupt Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) along the T2207 highway.**
- **The Kremlin continued to pursue inconsistent occupational measures in southern Ukraine, indicating both widespread Ukrainian resistance and likely Kremlin indecision on how to integrate occupied territory.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 2, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 1](#) [Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Frederick W. Kagan
June 1, 5:30pm ET

The Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast has gotten the attention of Russian forces in the area, and the Russians are scrambling to secure the vital ground line of communication (GLOC) the Ukrainians have threatened. Ukrainian forces carried out a series of organized counterattacks targeting settlements on the eastern bank of the Ihulets River that are very close to a key

highway supporting Russian forces further north. The Russians have responded by destroying the bridges the Ukrainians used in one of those counterattacks and other bridges across the river in an effort to hold their line against anticipated continued Ukrainian counter-offensive operations. Ukrainian forces are likely still close enough to the highway to disrupt its use as a main supply route, potentially undermining the Russians' ability to hold against Ukrainian counter-offensives from the north.

Russian milbloggers are expressing growing alarm about the threat of Ukrainian counteroffensives in the areas Russian forces have deprioritized while concentrating on Severodonetsk.

Russian milbloggers have increasingly focused on tracking the rate of Ukrainian counterattacks in late May. Pro-Russian Telegram channel "Dmitriyev" (over 100,000 followers) reported that Ukrainian forces are fully capable of inflicting "painful and cutting blows" on Russian GLOCs in Kherson, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhia Oblasts by July-August due to lack of adequate Russian defensive forces in the areas. Former Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) officer and milblogger Igor Girkin claimed that Ukrainian forces "will grope for weakness" in Russian defenses in Kherson Oblast. Russian milbloggers are effectively criticizing the Russian military command for endangering Russian territorial gains across other axes by prioritizing the Donbas offensive operation so heavily.

Russian authorities are likely anticipating Ukrainian partisan pressure in Luhansk Oblast. The Main Ukrainian Intelligence Directorate (GUR) announced on June 1 the launch of the "Luhansk partisan" project to galvanize resistance to Russian attempts to consolidate control of Luhansk Oblast. A Russian Telegram channel reported that the Russian Internal Ministry is sending a special detachment of its employees on "leave" to the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), which is a likely attempt to reinforce Russian administrative presence in the LNR in the face of growing internal and partisan discontent. The Ukrainian General Staff additionally stated that Russian forces moved a battalion tactical group (BTG) to Kupyansk, a Russian-controlled city in eastern Kharkiv Oblast along the P07 highway within 30 kilometers of the Luhansk Oblast administrative border. Kupyansk is far from the front lines and in no apparent danger of imminent Ukrainian conventional attack. Taken together, the reported deployment of Internal Ministry employees and a BTG suggest that Russian forces are anticipating partisan resistance against their attempts to gain control of Luhansk Oblast.

Russian forces continue to undermine the economic viability of areas they are attempting to capture. Russian forces reportedly hit the "Azot" fertilizer production plant in Severodonetsk on May 31 and caused the dissemination of toxic nitric acid smoke. The production plant was an economically-significant resource for Severodonetsk and the Luhansk region and it would have been prudent for Russian forces to maintain and take control of the plant's production capabilities. Russian forces similarly destroyed the Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol, which had considerable industrial significance for Ukraine and could have been economically exploited by Russian occupiers if they had not destroyed it. While the Azot plant in Severodonetsk was less productive on whole than Azovstal, its destruction is part of the systemic failure of Russian forces to take effective control of the economic and industrial capabilities of occupied territory. Russian forces will likely continue to destroy productive infrastructure and continually undermine the economic benefits they could have hoped to gain from occupied territories.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces reportedly made incremental advances north of Slovyansk but likely have not yet been able to take control of the road into Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces are attempting to advance towards Lysychansk from the south and west in order to avoid having to fight across the Siverskyi Donets River from Severodonetsk but are having limited successes so far.**
- **Russian troops made incremental gains north of Avdiivka.**
- **Russian troops reportedly destroyed Ukrainian-built bridges over the Inhulets River near Davydiv Brid in response to Ukrainian counteroffensive pressure.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 1, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 31](#) [Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan
May 31, 5:45pm ET

Moscow's concentration on seizing Severodonetsk and Donbas generally continues to create vulnerabilities for Russia in Ukraine's vital Kherson Oblast, where Ukrainian counter-offensives continue. Kherson is critical terrain because it is the only area of Ukraine in which Russian forces hold ground on the west bank of the Dnipro River. If Russia is able to retain a strong lodgment in Kherson

when fighting stops it will be in a very strong position from which to launch a future invasion. If Ukraine regains Kherson, on the other hand, Ukraine will be in a much stronger position to defend itself against future Russian attack. This strategic calculus should in principle lead Russia to allocate sufficient combat power to hold Kherson. But Russian President Vladimir Putin has chosen instead to concentrate all the forces and resources that can be scraped together in a desperate and bloody push to seize areas of eastern Ukraine that will give him largely symbolic gains. Continuing successful Ukrainian counter-offensives in Kherson indicate that Ukraine's commanders recognize these realities and are taking advantage of the vulnerabilities that Putin's decisions have created.

The Ukrainian leadership has apparently wisely avoided matching Putin's mistaken

prioritization. Kyiv could have committed more reserves and resources to the defense of Severodonetsk, and its failure to do so has drawn criticism.^[1] Ukrainian forces are now apparently withdrawing from Severodonetsk rather than fighting to the end—a factor that has allowed the Russians to move into the city relatively rapidly after beginning their full-scale assault.^[2] Both the decision to avoid committing more resources to saving Severodonetsk and the decision to withdraw from it were strategically sound, however painful. Ukraine must husband its more limited resources and focus on regaining critical terrain rather than on defending ground whose control will not determine the outcome of the war or the conditions for the renewal of war.

Sound Ukrainian prioritization of counter-offensive and defensive operations pushed the Russians almost out of artillery range of Kharkiv City and have stopped the Russian advances from Izyum—both of which are more important accomplishments than the defense of Severodonetsk. Ukraine's leadership has had to make incredibly difficult choices in this war and has generally made the right ones, at least at the level of strategic prioritization and in the pace, scale, and ambitiousness of its counter-offensives. **That is why Ukraine still has a good chance to stop and then reverse the gains Russia is currently making.**

Russian forces are likely attempting to exploit Belarusian equipment reserves to compensate for heavy material losses in Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 31 that Belarusian forces are moving tanks and infantry fighting vehicles from storage facilities in Belarus to Russia to replenish combat losses.^[3] This report corroborates previous reporting that Russian forces have largely exhausted their own reserves and indicates that the Kremlin is still leveraging its influence over Belarus in order to use Belarusian equipment.

Some pro-Russian milbloggers began to capture the frustrating realities of limited warfare, which may further intensify societal tensions in Russia.

Pro-Russian political figure and self-proclaimed "People's Governor of Donetsk Oblast" Pavel Gubarev said that the limited mobilization of Russians for war has divided Russian society into two groups: a small proportion that is involved in the war and the "peacetime Russians" who distance themselves from the war effort and are inconvenienced by foreign sanctions.^[4] Gubarev blamed the "peacetime Russians" for failing to start collecting donations for Russian equipment, while criticizing the Kremlin for increasing propaganda about Russian successes during the "special military operation" in Ukraine. Gubarev also blamed the "peacetime Russians" for slowing down rotation rates due to fear of conscription. Gubarev noted that mass mobilization could resolve the divide in society but opined that Russian commanders will not order such a mobilization to avoid mass casualties of unprepared conscripts as occurred, he notes, in the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR).

Gubarev is accurately capturing a phenomenon that is normal in a limited war that nevertheless generates high casualties. Resentment by those fighting such a war and their families against those who are untouched by the horrors of combat can grow even in an all-volunteer professional military, as Western countries experienced during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. It is likely to be even more pronounced in Russia, whose military relies so heavily on conscripts and involuntarily-recalled reservists. This resentment can erode morale and will to fight as well as the propensity to volunteer for military service.

Russian citizens continued to conduct a series of attacks on Russian military recruitment centers in late May, likely in protest of covert mobilization. Russian Telegram channel Baza reported that the Russian Federal Security Service arrested a former Moscow artist and opposition figure, Ilya Farber, for Molotov Cocktail attacks on military recruitment centers in Udmurtia in the Urals on May 21.^[5] A Russian court had previously sentenced Farber to an eight-year prison sentence for a bribery case. The case

gained Farber significant support from Russian opposition leaders.[6] Farber admitted to committing arson in court on May 30. Baza also reported two more attacks on recruitment centers in Simferopol and Tula Oblast on May 28 and May 31, respectively.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are increasingly focused on advancing on Slovyansk from the southeast of Izyum and west of Lyman.**
- **Russian forces are making gains within and around Severodonetsk.**
- **Russian forces are likely hoping to advance on Lysychansk from Toshkivka in order to avoid having to fight across the Severskyi Donets River from Severodonetsk.**
- **The Russian grouping in Kherson Oblast is likely feeling the pressure of the limited Ukrainian counteroffensive in northwestern Kherson Oblast, especially as much of the Russian operational focus is currently on the capture of Severodonetsk.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 31, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 30](#) [Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros
May 30, 3:30pm ET

Mounting casualties among Russian junior officers will likely further degrade Russian capabilities and lead to further morale breakdowns. The UK Ministry of Defense stated on May 30 that Russian forces have suffered devastating losses amongst mid and junior ranking officers. The UK MoD reported that battalion and brigade level officers continue to deploy forwards and into harm's way—rather than

commanding from rear areas and delegating to lower-ranking officers—due to senior Russian officers holding them to an “uncompromising level of responsibility” for their units.[1] The British Defense Ministry further reported that junior officers are in charge of low-level tactical operations due to a lack of professionalism and modernization within the Russian Armed Forces and that the continued losses of these junior officers will complicate command and control efforts, particularly in Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs) cobbled together from the survivors of multiple other units.[2] ISW previously assessed that continued demoralization and poor command and control among Russian forces could present Ukrainian forces opportunities to conduct prudent counteroffensives, particularly as the Russian military continues to pour resources into the battle of Severodonetsk at the cost of other lines of effort.

Domestic dissent within Russian military circles, claiming that the Kremlin is not doing enough to win the war, continues to grow. Former Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) officer Igor Girkin (also known as Strelkov) condemned Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s statements about the priority of the “special operation” in Ukraine being the liberation of the Donbas.[3] Girkin claimed that the Kremlin has forgone the ideological underpinnings of the conflict by focusing the conflict on the Donbas, rather than the entirety of Ukraine. Girkin complained that Kremlin officials are no longer questioning the legitimacy of the existence of Ukraine and that the concepts of “denazification” and “demilitarization” have been forgotten. Girkin accused the Kremlin of appeasement policies and stated that the threat of defeat continues to grow.

Girkin’s dissent is emblematic of continued shifts within circles of Russian military enthusiasts and ex-servicemen. As ISW has previously reported, the Kremlin has repeatedly revised its objectives for the war in Ukraine downwards due to battlefield failures. The Kremlin is increasingly facing discontent not from Russians opposed to the war as a whole, but military and nationalist figures angry at Russian losses and frustrated with shifting Kremlin framing of the war. Russian officials are increasingly unable to employ the same ideological justifications for the invasion in the face of clear setbacks, and a lack of concrete military gains within Ukraine will continue to foment domestic dissatisfaction with the war.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces continued to incrementally capture areas of Severodonetsk but have not yet fully encircled the city.
- Russian forces focused on regrouping near Izyum to renew offensives towards Slovyansk and Barvinkove and conducted only minor, unsuccessful, attacks. Russian forces are making incremental advances towards Slovyansk and seek to assault the city itself in the coming weeks, but are unlikely to achieve decisive gains.
- Russian forces in Kharkiv continue to focus efforts on preventing a Ukrainian counteroffensive from reaching the international border between Kharkiv and Belgorod, and Ukrainian forces have not conducted any significant operations in the area in recent days.
- The limited Ukrainian counterattack in northern Kherson Oblast did not take any further ground in the last 48 hours but has disrupted Russian operations. Russian forces launched several unsuccessful attacks against the Ukrainian bridgehead on the east bank of the Inhulets River.
- Mounting casualties among Russian junior officers will further degrade Russian morale and command and control capabilities.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 30, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 29

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

May 29, 5:30 pm ET

New reports confirmed that Ukrainian forces conducted a successful limited counterattack near the Kherson-Mykolaiv oblast border on May 28, forcing Russian forces onto the defensive. This Ukrainian counterattack is likely intended to disrupt Russian efforts to establish strong defensive positions

along the Southern Axis. While the Ukrainian counterattack does not appear likely to retake substantial territory in the near term, it will likely disrupt Russian operations and potentially force Russia to deploy reinforcements to the Kherson region, which is predominantly held by sub-standard units. Ukrainian counterattacks may additionally slow Russian efforts to consolidate administrative control of occupied southern Ukraine.[1]

Russian forces continued to assault Severodonetsk on May 29 but did not make any confirmed advances; Russian progress in intense urban combat will likely be slow. The Russian campaign in eastern Ukraine—which previously aimed to capture the entirety of Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts—is now focused almost entirely on Severodonetsk. Russian troops are unlikely to be able to conduct multiple simultaneous operations and will likely further deprioritize advances southeast of Izyum and west of Lyman in favor of concentrating available forces on Severodonetsk in the coming days.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued attempts to take full control of Severodonetsk.**
- **Russian forces continued offensives southeast of Izyum but did not make any confirmed advances toward Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations to cut Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) northeast of Bakhmut and appear unlikely to attempt to directly assault the city.**
- **The Ukrainian counteroffensive in northwestern Kherson Oblast has forced Russian troops to take up defensive positions and will likely disrupt Russian efforts to effectively dig in and consolidate control of occupied areas along the Southern Axis.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 28

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, Kateryna Stepanenko, and George Barros

May 28, 7:30pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin is inflicting unspeakable suffering on Ukrainians and demanding horrible sacrifices of his own people in an effort to seize a city that does not merit the cost, even for him.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine that aimed to seize and occupy the entire country has become a desperate and bloody offensive to capture a single city in the east while defending important but limited gains in the south and east. Ukraine has twice forced Putin to define down his military objectives. Ukraine defeated Russia in the Battle of Kyiv, forcing Putin to reduce his subsequent military objectives to seizing Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine stopped him from achieving that aim as well, forcing him to focus on completing the seizure of Luhansk Oblast alone. Putin is now hurling men and munitions at the last remaining major population center in that oblast, Severodonetsk, as if taking it would win the war for the Kremlin. He is wrong. **When the Battle of Severodonetsk ends, regardless of which side holds the city, the Russian offensive at the operational and strategic levels will likely have culminated, giving Ukraine the chance to restart its operational-level counteroffensives to push Russian forces back.**

Russian forces are assaulting Severodonetsk even though they have not yet encircled it. They are making territorial gains and may succeed in taking the city and areas further west. The Ukrainian military is facing the most serious challenge it has encountered since the isolation of the Azovstal Plant in Mariupol and may well suffer a significant tactical defeat in the coming days if Severodonetsk falls, although such an outcome is by no means certain, and the Russian attacks may well stall again.

The Russians are paying a price for their current tactical success that is out of proportion to any real operational or strategic benefit they can hope to receive. Severodonetsk itself is important at this stage in the war primarily because it is the last significant population center in Luhansk Oblast that the Russians do not control. Seizing it will let Moscow declare that it has secured Luhansk Oblast fully but will give Russia no other significant military or economic benefit. This is especially true because Russian forces are destroying the city as they assault it and will control its rubble if they capture it. Taking Severodonetsk can open a Russian ground line of communication (GLOC) to support operations to the west, but the Russians have failed to secure much more advantageous GLOCs from Izyum partly because they have concentrated so much on Severodonetsk.

The Russians continue to make extremely limited progress in their efforts to gain control of the unoccupied areas of Donetsk Oblast, meanwhile. Russian troops have struggled to penetrate the pre-February 24 line of contact for weeks, while Russian offensive operations from Izyum to the south remain largely stalled. The seizure of Severodonetsk could only assist in the conquest of the rest of Donetsk Oblast if it gave the Russians momentum on which to build successive operations, but the Battle of Severodonetsk will most likely preclude continued large-scale Russian offensive operations.

Russian progress around Severodonetsk results largely from the fact that Moscow has concentrated forces, equipment, and materiel drawn from all other axes on this one objective.

Russian troops have been unable to make progress on any other axes for weeks and have largely not even tried to do so. Ukrainian defenders have inflicted fearful casualties on the Russian attackers around Severodonetsk even so. Moscow will not be able to recoup large amounts of effective combat power even if it seizes Severodonetsk, because it is expending that combat power frivolously on taking the city.

Ukrainian forces are also suffering serious losses in the Battle of Severodonetsk, as are Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure. The Russians have concentrated a much higher proportion of their available offensive combat power to take Severodonetsk than the Ukrainians, however, shaping the attrition gradient generally in Kyiv's favor. The Ukrainians continue to receive supplies and materiel from their allies as well, however slow and limited that flow may be. The Russians, in contrast, continue to manifest clear signs that they are burning through their available reserves of manpower and materiel with no reason to expect relief in the coming months.

Evidence of eroding military professionalism in the Russian officer corps is mounting. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russian commanders are attempting to preserve military equipment by forbidding drivers from evacuating wounded servicemen or providing supplies to units that have advanced too far.^[1] Refusing to risk equipment to evacuate wounded personnel on the battlefield—other than in extraordinary circumstances—is a remarkable violation of core principles of military professionalism. Such behavior can have serious impacts on morale and the willingness of soldiers to fight and risk getting injured beyond their own defensive lines. ISW cannot independently confirm the GUR's report, but commentary by Russian milbloggers offers some circumstantial support for it. Russian milblogger Alexander Zhychkovskiy criticized the Russian military command's disregard for reservists on the deprioritized Zaporizhia Oblast front. Zhychkovskiy reported that Russian commanders trapped lightly-equipped infantry units in areas of intense Ukrainian artillery fire

without significant artillery support and did not rotate other units through those areas to relieve them.[2] Zhychkovskiy noted that Russian commanders are responsible for high losses and cases of insanity among servicemen. Another milblogger, Alexander Khodarkovsky, said that Russian commanders are not sending reinforcements in a timely matter, preventing Russian forces from resting between ground assaults.[3]

Waning professionalism among Russia's officers could present Ukrainian forces with opportunities. Russian morale, already low, may drop further if such behavior is widespread and continues. If Russian troops stuck on secondary axes lose their will to fight as the Battle for Severodonetsk consumes much of the available Russian offensive combat power, Ukraine may have a chance to launch significant counteroffensives with good prospects for success. That prospect is uncertain, and Ukraine may not have the ability to take advantage of an opportunity even if it presents itself, but the current pattern of Russian operations is generating serious vulnerabilities that Kyiv will likely attempt to exploit.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces pressed the ground assault on Severodonetsk and its environs, making limited gains.**
- **Russian forces in Kharkiv continue to focus efforts on preventing a Ukrainian counteroffensive from reaching the international border between Kharkiv and Belgorod.**
- **Ukrainian forces began a counteroffensive near the Kherson-Mykolaiv oblast border approximately 70 km to the northeast of Kherson City that may have crossed the Inhulets River.**
- **Russia's use of stored T-62 tanks in the southern axis indicates Russia's continued materiel and force generation problems.**
- **Ukrainian partisan activity continues to impose costs on Russian occupation forces in Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 27

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko and Mason Clark

May 27, 7:30pm ET

Russian forces began direct assaults on Severodonetsk on May 27 despite not yet having fully encircled the town. Russian forces have performed poorly in operations in built-up urban terrain throughout the war to date and are unlikely to be able to advance rapidly in Severodonetsk itself. Russian

forces continue to make steady and incremental gains around the city but have not yet encircled the Ukrainian defenders. Ukrainian forces continue to maintain defenses across eastern Ukraine and have slowed most Russian lines of advance. Russian forces will likely continue to make incremental advances and may succeed in encircling Severodonetsk in the coming days, but Russian operations around Izyum remain stalled and Russian forces will likely be unable to increase the pace of their advances.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces began direct assaults on built-up areas of Severodonetsk without having fully encircled the city and will likely struggle to take ground in the city itself.**
- **Russian forces in Lyman appear to be dividing their efforts—attacking both southwest to support stalled forces in Izyum and southeast to advance on Siversk; they will likely struggle to accomplish either objective in the coming days.**
- **Russian forces in Popasna seek to advance north to support the encirclement of Severodonetsk rather than advancing west toward Bakhmut.**
- **Positions northeast of Kharkiv City remain largely static, with no major attacks by either Russian or Ukrainian forces.**
- **Russian forces continue to fortify their defensive positions along the southern axis and advance efforts to integrate the Kherson region into Russian economic and political structures.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 27, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 26

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

May 26, 6:30pm ET

Russian forces have made steady, incremental gains in heavy fighting in eastern Ukraine in the past several days, though Ukrainian defenses remain effective overall. Deputy Ukrainian Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated that the fighting is currently at its "maximum intensity" compared to previous

Russian assaults and will likely continue to escalate.[1] Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Defense Ministry Oleksandr Motuzyanyk characterized Russian gains as “temporary success” and stated that Ukrainian forces are using a maneuver defense to put pressure on Russian advances in key areas.[2] Russian forces have now taken control of over 95% of Luhansk Oblast and will likely continue efforts to complete the capture of Severodonetsk in the coming days.[3] Russian forces have made several gains in the past week, but their offensive operations remain slow. Russian forces are heavily degraded and will struggle to replace further losses.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to advance southeast of Izyum near the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border.**
- **Russian forces continued steady advances around Severodonetsk and likely seek to completely encircle the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area in the coming days.**
- **Russian forces continued to make persistent advances south and west of Popasna toward Bakhmut, but the Russian pace of advance will likely slow as they approach the town itself.**
- **Russian forces in occupied areas of the Southern Axis are reportedly preparing a “third line of defense” to consolidate long-term control over the region and in preparation to repel likely future Ukrainian counteroffensives.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 25

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Frederick W. Kagan, and George Barros
May 25, 7:15 pm ET

Some pro-Russian milbloggers on Telegram continued to criticize the Kremlin for appalling treatment of forcefully mobilized Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) servicemen—contradicting Russian information campaigns about progress of the Russian special military operation. Former Russian Federal Security Service officer Igor Girkin (also known by the alias Igor Strelkov) amplified a critique to his 360,000 followers from a smaller milblogger discussing a video wherein a DNR battalion appealed to DNR Head Denis Pushilin about maltreatment of forcefully mobilized forces.[1] The milblogger blamed Russian leadership, not Pushilin, for beginning the invasion with insufficient reserves and unprepared, forcefully mobilized forces. The milblogger added that Russia did not provide the soldiers of its proxy republics with new weapons, despite claiming that Ukrainian forces prepared to attack occupied Donbas areas for a year prior to Russian invasion. The milblogger also claimed that the Kremlin failed to mobilize and adequately prepare the next batch of reserves, while Ukrainian forces are successfully preparing their troops for counteroffensives. Girkin also criticized the Kremlin for failing to pay the DNR battalion for three months. Some milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces staged the video, but the video still gathered attention of pro-Russian Telegram users.[2] The incident highlights a continuing shift in the Russian-language milblogger information space regardless of the video's authenticity. Milbloggers would likely have either attacked or dismissed such a video loudly and in near-unison earlier in the war, when they all generally focused on presenting optimistic pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian narratives. The response to this video in the Russian-language milblogger space demonstrates the strong resonance anti-Kremlin narratives can now have. It is impossible to know what effect this change in this information space might have on general perceptions of the war in Russia, but it is one of the most visible and noteworthy inflections in the attitudes of previously strongly pro-Kremlin ostensibly independent Russian voices speaking to Russians that we have yet seen. Today's statement by DNR Militia Head Eduard Basurin explaining that Russian forces would focus on creating "smaller cauldrons" rather than on a single large encirclement is likely in part a response to a critique that surfaced both in the milblogger space and in the Russian Duma that Russian forces had failed to form and reduce "cauldrons" of the sort they used in 2014.[3] Basurin's statement, along with other changes in the ways in which Russian officials have spoken about cauldrons and Russian operations in the east following those critiques suggest that the Russian and proxy leadership is sensitive to shifts in this information space.[4]

Russian forces are increasingly facing a deficiency in high-precision weaponry. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that due to an increasing lack of high-precision weapons Russian forces are seeking other methods of striking critical infrastructure and have intensified the use of aircraft to support offensives.[5] The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) noted that up to 60% of Russia's high-precision stockpile has already been exhausted, which is consistent with previous reports by Western defense officials that Russian forces have been increasingly relying on "dumb bombs" because they are facing challenges replenishing their supplies of precision munitions in part due to sanctions targeting Russia's defense-industrial production.[6] A lack of high-precision weapons will likely result in an increase in indiscriminate attacks on critical and civilian infrastructure.

The Kremlin is attempting to expand the pool of Russian passport-holders in occupied areas. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on May 25 that will simplify the procedure for obtaining a Russian passport within Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblasts.[7] This renewed campaign of so-called "mass passportization" is occurring in occupied territories and likely represents an effort to set conditions for some sort of post-conflict political arrangement (the precise form of which Putin prefers remains unclear) through manipulating access to Russian citizenship.[8] Occupation authorities may additionally attempt to exploit this new decree to carry out covert mobilization in occupied areas, as having a Russian passport would make conscription-eligible residents of occupied territories subject to forced military service.

The Kremlin and Russian military commanders are introducing new regulations aimed at addressing the diminishing level of combat-ready reserves. The Russian State Duma and the Russian Federation Council passed a bill raising the maximum age for voluntary enlistment into the Russian military from 40 to 50.[9] Russian Telegram channels also reported that Russian leadership forced operational officers and commanders of the Russian Border Guards of southern Russian regions including Rostov Oblast and occupied Crimea to indefinitely cancel all summer vacations--a rather unsurprising step in light of the military situation in principle, but an indication of the next source of manpower to which Putin will apparently turn.[10] Russian Border Guards will reportedly deploy to training

grounds for unspecified exercises in late May. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces are forming new reserve units within the Southern Military District.[11]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces prioritized advances east and west of Popasna in order to cut Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) southwest of Severodonetsk and complete encirclement efforts in Luhansk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces have likely entered Lyman and may use this foothold to coordinate with advances southeast of Izyum to launch an offensive on Siversk.**
- **Russian forces may start the Battle of Severodonetsk prior to completely cutting off Ukrainian GLOCs southwest and northwest of Severodonetsk.**
- **Russian forces struck Zaporizhzhia City in an attempt to disrupt a key logistics hub for Ukrainian forces operating in the east.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 25, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 24

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and Mason Clark
May 24, 7:00 pm ET

Russian forces have likely abandoned efforts to complete a single large encirclement of Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine and are instead attempting to secure smaller encirclements—enabling them to make incremental measured gains. Russian forces are likely attempting to achieve several

simultaneous encirclements of small pockets of Ukrainian forces in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts: the broader Severodonetsk area (including Rubizhne and Lysychansk), Bakhmut-Lysychansk, around Zolote (just northeast of Popasna), and around Ukrainian fortifications in Avdiivka. Russian forces have begun steadily advancing efforts in these different encirclements daily but have not achieved any major “breakthroughs” or made major progress towards their stated objectives of securing the Donetsk Oblast borders or seizing all of Donbas. Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai reported that Ukrainian forces only controlled approximately 10 percent of Luhansk Oblast as of May 15 (compared to 30 percent prior to the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022).[1] Russian forces have secured more terrain in the past week than efforts earlier in May. However, they have done so by reducing the scope of their objectives—largely abandoning operations around Izyum and concentrating on key frontline towns: Russian performance remains poor.

Russian forces will additionally likely face protracted urban combat if they successfully encircle Severodonetsk (as well as in other large towns like Bakhmut), which Russian forces have struggled with throughout the war. Russian forces are committing a significant number of their troops, artillery, and aircraft to defeat Ukrainian defenders in Luhansk Oblast and are likely pulling necessary resources from the Izyum axis, defensive positions around Kharkiv City, Donetsk City, and the Zaporizhia area. Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai has previously compared Ukrainian forces in Luhansk Oblast to the previous defenders of Mariupol, which aimed to wear out Russian forces and prevent further offensive operations.[2] The UK Defense Ministry also noted that a Russian victory over Severodonetsk will only worsen Russian logistical issues and extend Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs).[3] **Russian forces are making greater advances in the past week than throughout the rest of May—but these advances remain slow, confined to smaller objectives than the Kremlin intended, and face continued Ukrainian defenses; they do not constitute a major breakthrough.**

Senior Kremlin officials are increasingly openly admitting that the Russian offensive in Ukraine is moving slower than anticipated and are grasping for explanations to justify the slow pace. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu claimed that Russian operations in Ukraine are progressing slowly because Russian forces want to afford civilians the opportunity to evacuate, though Russian forces have targeted Ukrainian civilians throughout the war and repeatedly denied Ukrainian attempts to negotiate humanitarian evacuation corridors.[4] Shoigu’s statement is notably his first admission that Russian forces are behind schedule and is the first official statement on the pace of the war since Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stated that the operation was “dragging” on May 4.[5] Russian milbloggers are criticizing Shoigu’s claimed consideration for civilians and claimed that Soviet troops would not have cared if “Nazi” civilians evacuated, part of the growing Russian nationalist reaction that the Kremlin is not doing enough to win the war in Ukraine.[6] Director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Sergey Naryshkin stated that the ultimate goal of the Russian offensive is to ensure “Nazism” is “100% eradicated, or it will rear its head in a few years, and in an even uglier form.”[7] Naryshkin and Shoigu’s statements indicate that Russian officials are likely setting conditions for a protracted war in Ukraine in order to justify slower and more measured advances than initially anticipated.

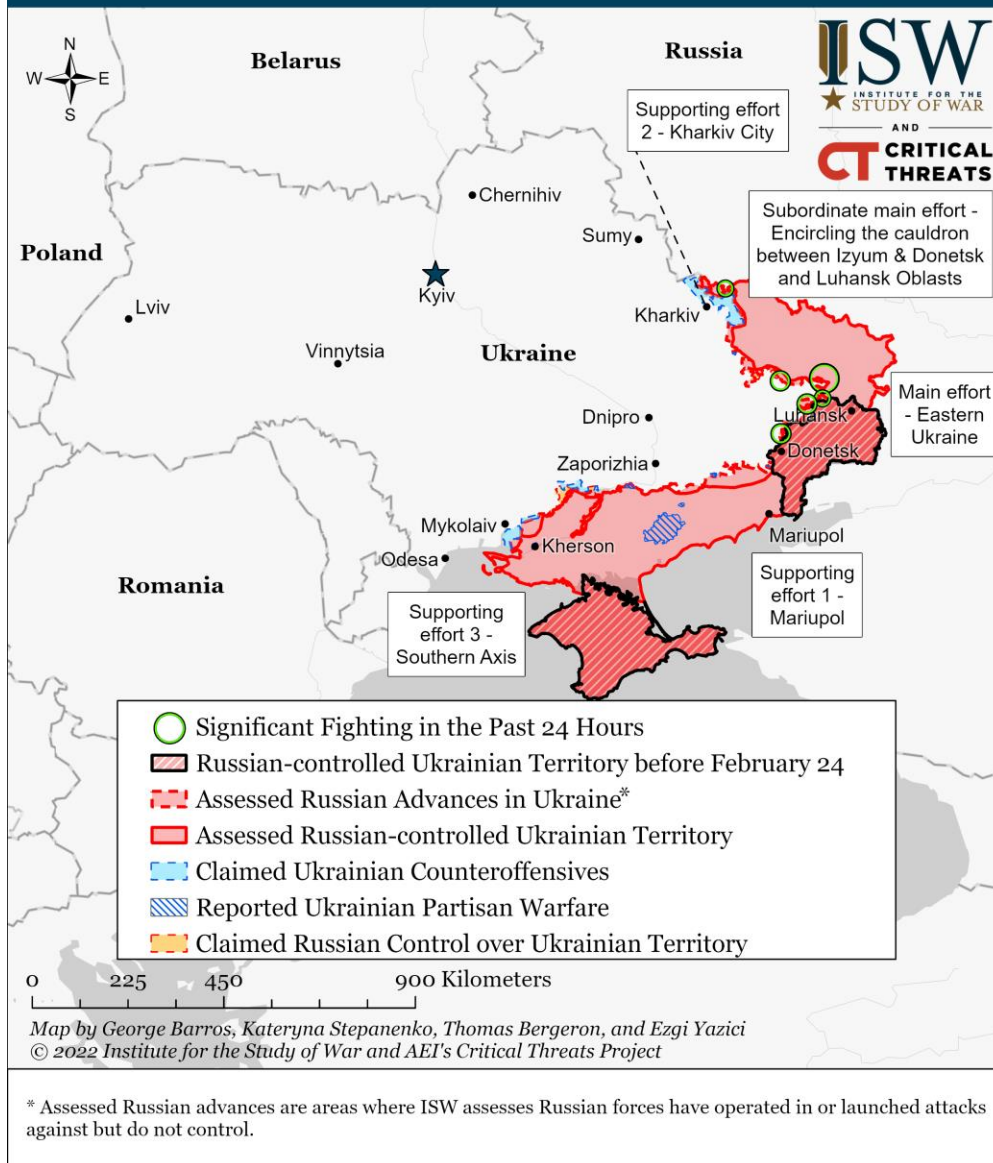
Forcefully mobilized servicemen from the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics continued to protest the Russian and proxy military command. Servicemen of the 3rd Infantry Battalion of the 105th Infantry Regiment from the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) recorded a video appeal to DNR Head Denis Pushilin wherein they claimed they were mobilized on February 23 and that they have been forced to actively participate in hostilities despite their lack of military experience. The battalion stated that they served on the frontlines in Mariupol and have been redeployed to the territory of the Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) with only 60% of their original personnel and are now dealing with severe morale issues and physical exhaustion. The battalion notably claimed that the servicemen did not go through routine medical inspection prior to service and that many are suffering from chronic illnesses that should have rendered them ineligible for service. The video appeal is consistent with numerous reports from Ukrainian and Western sources that proxy forces are largely forcibly mobilized, poorly trained, and suffering from declining morale, but is notable due to the willingness of the DNR servicemen to publicly express their discontent.[8]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces have likely abandoned efforts to encircle large Ukrainian formations in eastern Ukraine and are instead attempting to secure smaller encirclements and focus on Severodonetsk.**

- This change in the Russian approach is enabling gradual advances—but at the cost of abandoning several intended lines of advance and abandoning the Kremlin’s intended deep encirclement of Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces are likely conducting a controlled withdrawal southwest of Popasna near Bakhmut to protect Ukrainian supply lines against Russian offensives in the southeast of Bakhmut.
- Russian occupation authorities in Mariupol announced that they will hold war crimes trials against Ukrainian soldiers in Mariupol in a likely effort to strengthen judicial control of the city and support false Kremlin narratives of Ukrainian crimes.
- Russian forces are attempting to retake Ternova in northern Kharkiv Oblast and seek to stabilize defensive positions near the Russian border against the Ukrainian counteroffensive.
- Russian forces are forming reserves and deploying S-400 missile systems in northwest Crimea to reinforce the southern axis.
- Several DNR servicemen openly released a video appeal to DNR leader Denis Pushilin stating they have been forced into combat operations without proper support, indicating increasing demoralization among Russian and proxy forces.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 23

[Click here to read the latest report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros
May 23, 6:00 pm ET

Russian nationalist figures are increasingly criticizing the failures of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine and are calling for further mobilization that the Kremlin likely remains unwilling and unable to pursue in the short term. The All-Russian Officers Assembly, an independent

pro-Russian veterans' association that seeks to reform Russian military strategy, called for Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin to declare war on Ukraine and introduce partial mobilization in Russia on May 19.[1] The Assembly said that Russia's "special military operation" failed to achieve its goals in three months, especially after the failed Siverskyi Donetsk River crossings. ISW previously assessed that the destruction of nearly an entire Russian battalion tactical group (BTG) during a failed river crossing on May 11 shocked Russian military observers and prompted them to question Russian competence.[2] The Assembly's appeal called on Putin to recognize that Russian forces are no longer only "denazifying" Ukraine but are fighting a war for Russia's historic territories and existence in the world order. The officers demanded that the Kremlin mobilize all regions bordering NATO countries (including Ukraine), form territorial defense squads, extend standard military service terms from one year to two, and form new supreme wartime administrations over Russia, the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR), and newly occupied Ukrainian settlements. The officers also demanded the death penalty for deserters.

The Assembly's letter may be a leading indicator of elements of the Russian government and society setting informational conditions to declare partial mobilization. However, the Kremlin has so far declined to take this step likely due to concerns over domestic backlash and flaws in Russia's mobilization systems.[3] The All-Russian Officers Assembly called on Putin to recognize the independence of the DNR and LNR three weeks prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, setting conditions for the Russian "special military operation." [4] Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced on May 20 that Russia will form 12 new Western Military District units (of unspecified echelon) before the end of the year in response to NATO expansion.[5] Russian forces may intend to man these units with newly mobilized personnel, as it is unclear how else the Kremlin could generate the manpower for new units. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces are withdrawing old T-62 tanks from storage to form new BTGs.[6] Russia is likely continuing to exhaust its remaining combat-ready reserves to maintain the momentum of the Battle of Severodonetsk, rather than prioritizing preparations for new reinforcements. ISW previously assessed that Russian mobilization is unlikely to generate combat-ready force due to hasty training.[7]

More Russians supportive of the Kremlin and the Russian invasion of Ukraine are beginning to criticize the Kremlin openly. Russian milbloggers claimed that the Kremlin will not honor the Officers Assembly appeal, indicating an intensifying negative perception of the Russian leadership among Russians supportive of the war in Ukraine.[8] Kaliningrad Oblast Governor Anton Alikhanov publicly stated that the Russian war in Ukraine has disrupted transport routes and construction schedules in the region, a rare admission of the economic cost of the war from a Russian government official.[9] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian military personnel are increasingly complaining about the ineffectiveness of offensive operations against Ukrainian troops.[10]

Unidentified assailants continued attacks against military recruitment offices in Russia on May 23, indicating growing discontent with conscription.[11] A Russian Telegram channel reported that an unknown attacker threw a Molotov cocktail at the military recruitment office in the Udmurtia region, which follows a May 19 incident wherein a Russian conscript shot at a recruitment office in Zheleznogorsk-Ilimsky (Irkutsk Oblast) with a pneumatic device.[12] The Ukrainian General Staff previously reported that 12 total attacks on recruitment offices have happened since the beginning of the war, with five happening in the past few weeks alone.[13] These attacks may represent growing domestic discontent with conscription and recruitment practices.

The UK Ministry of Defense reported that Russia has suffered a similar death toll within the first three months of the invasion of Ukraine as was experienced by the Soviet Union over the course of nine years in Afghanistan.[14] The British Ministry of Defense stated that a combination of poor low-level tactics, poor air defense, lack of operational flexibility, and poor command methods have resulted in repeated mistakes and failures, which are continuing to be evident in Donbas. The report noted that the Russian public is sensitive to high casualty numbers, and assessed that as casualties suffered in Ukraine grow and become harder to conceal, public dissatisfaction will increase.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian nationalist figures (including veterans and military commentators) are increasingly criticizing the failures of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine and are calling for further mobilization that the Kremlin likely remains unwilling and unable to pursue in the short term.**

- Russian forces around Izyum increased their tempo of air and artillery strikes and likely intend to attempt to resume stalled offensive operations in the coming days.
- Russian operations to encircle Severodonetsk made minor gains in the past 24 hours, driving north through Zolote. Fighting is ongoing in Lyman (north of Severodonetsk) as Russian forces attempt to cut off Ukrainian supply lines
- Russian forces will likely make further minor gains west of Popasna in the near future but are unlikely to be able to quickly seize Bakhmut.
- The Ukrainian counteroffensive northeast of Kharkiv continues to threaten Russian positions and is forcing Russia to pull units from ongoing offensive operations in eastern Ukraine to shore up their defensive positions near Vovchansk.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 22

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, George Barros, and Mason Clark

May 22, 4:00 pm ET

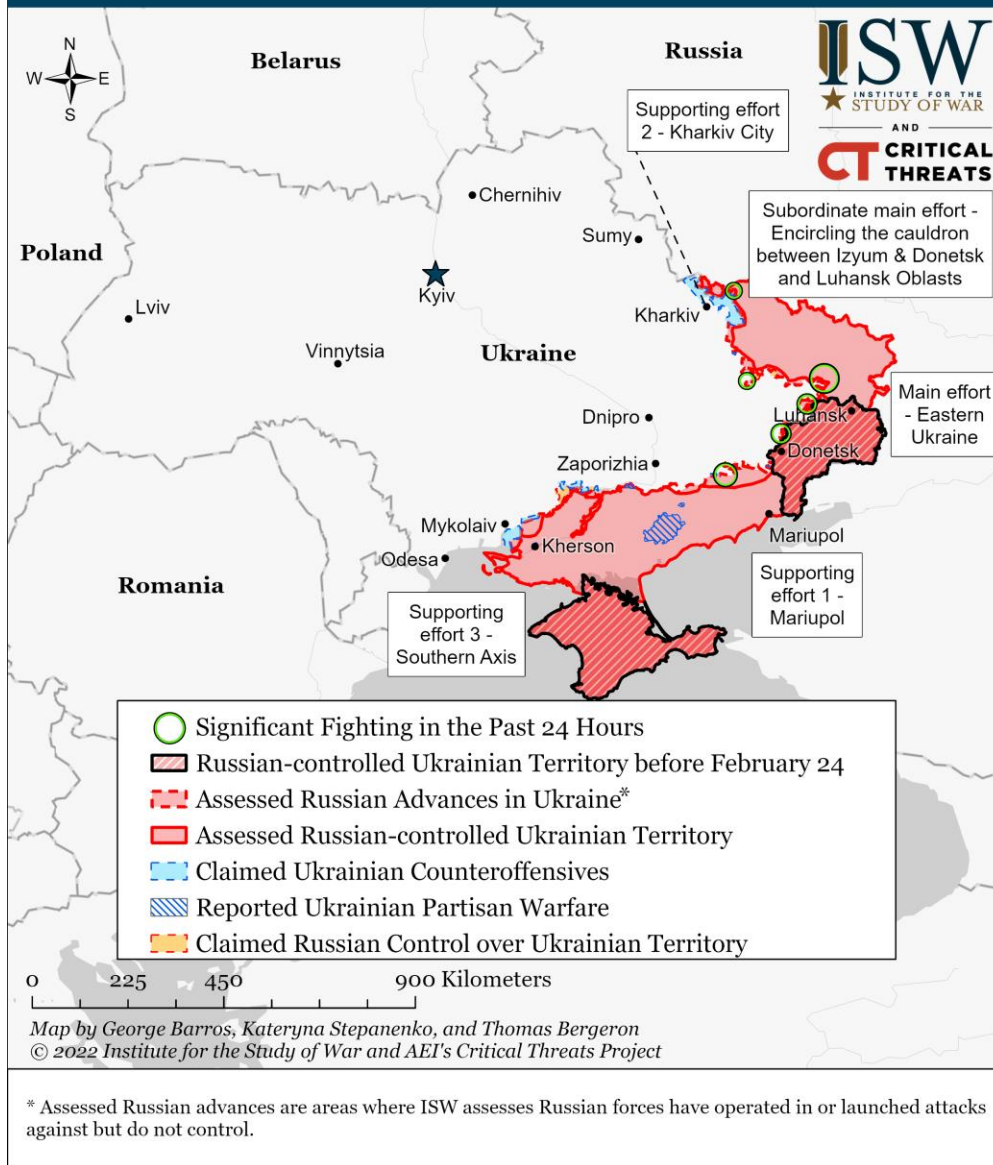
Russian forces made only minimal gains in eastern Ukraine on May 22. New reporting confirmed that Russian troops previously recaptured Rubizhne in northern Kharkiv Oblast, on May 19. Russian forces are likely committing additional reinforcements to hold their positions on the west bank of the

Siverskyi Donets River in northern Kharkiv—rather than withdrawing across the river to use it as a defensive position—to prevent any further Ukrainian advances to the north or the east that could threaten Russian lines of communication to the Izyum axis.^[1] Ukrainian sources additionally confirmed previous Russian-claimed advances around Popasna, and Russian forces likely seek to open a new line of advance north from Popasna to complete the encirclement of Severodonetsk while simultaneously driving west toward Bakhmut, though Russian forces are unlikely to be able to fully resource both lines of advance simultaneously.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian sources confirmed that Russian forces have secured local advances to the north and west of Popasna since at least May 20. Russian forces likely seek to push further west toward Bakhmut and north to support the encirclement of Severodonetsk but remain unlikely to achieve rapid advances.**
- **Russian forces will likely attempt to hold positions west of the Siverskyi Donets River against Ukrainian attacks (rather than retreating across the river) to prevent further Ukrainian advances from threatening Russian lines of communication to Izyum.**
- **Russian occupying forces continued filtration and deportation procedures in and around Mariupol.**
- **Russian forces are likely preparing to resume offensives on the southern axis.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 22, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 21

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, George Barros, and Mason Clark

May 21, 5:30 pm ET

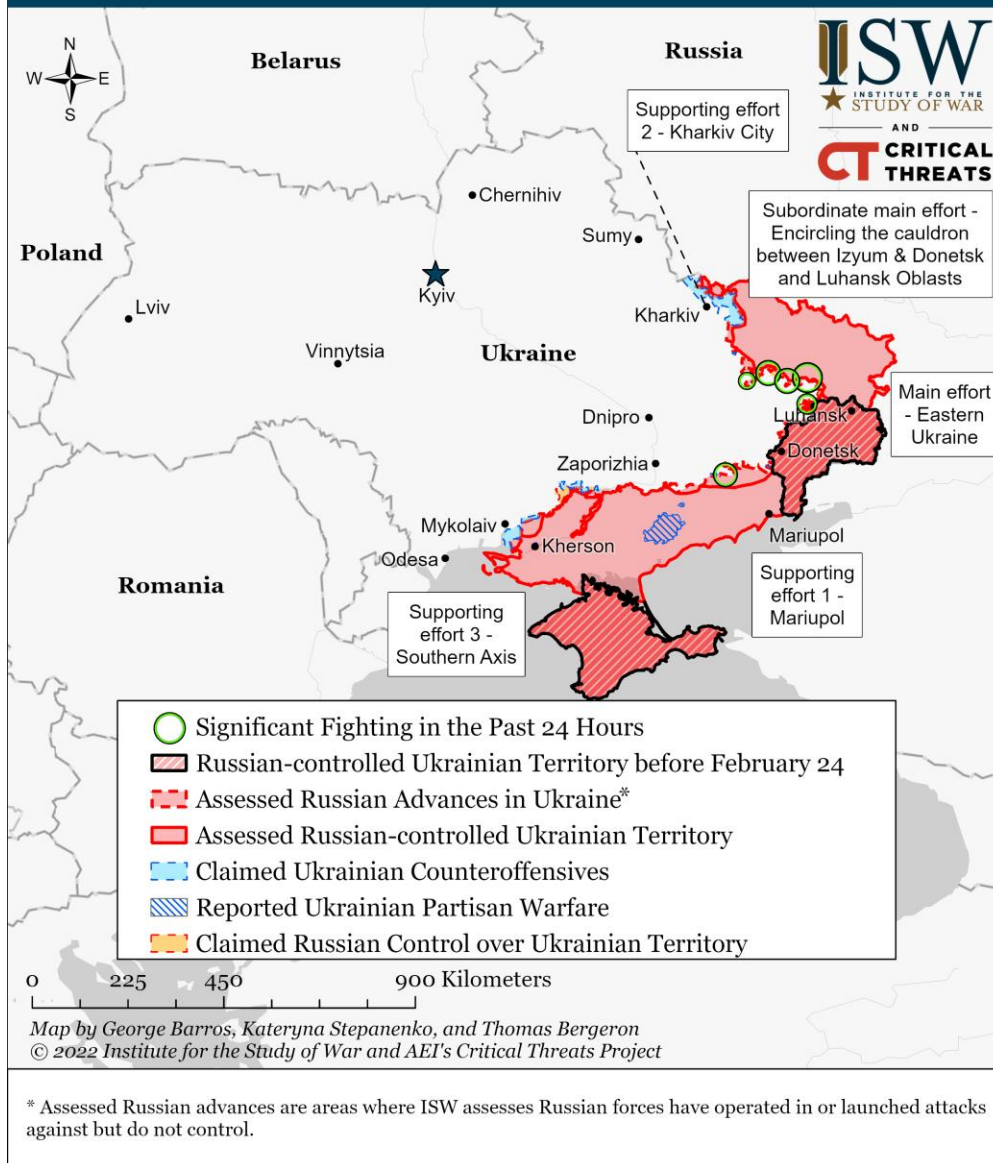
Russian forces intensified efforts to encircle and capture Severodonetsk on May 21 and will likely continue to do so in the coming days as efforts on other axes of advance, including Izyum, remain largely stalled. Russian troops in Luhansk Oblast will likely move to capitalize on recent gains made in

the Rubizhne-Severodonetsk-Luhansk-Popasna arc to encircle and besiege Severodonetsk—the final Ukrainian strongpoint in Luhansk Oblast. Russian milbloggers are hypothesizing on the success of Russian tactics in the area and have dubbed it the Battle of Severodonetsk—emphasizing that this is the preliminary line of effort in the Donbas theatre.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are conducting operations to cut off Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) between Severodonetsk and Lysychansk across the Severskyi Donetsk River.**
- **The information space in Mariupol will likely become increasingly restricted in the coming weeks as Russian forces shift focus from completing the capture of the Azovstal Steel Plant to consolidating occupational control of the city.**
- **Russian troops are likely reinforcing their grouping around Kharkiv City to prevent further Ukrainian advances toward the international border.**
- **Russian forces may be assembling forces in certain areas of Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts to initiate further offensive operations on the southern axis.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 21, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 20

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Frederick W. Kagan, and George Barros
May 20, 5:30 ET

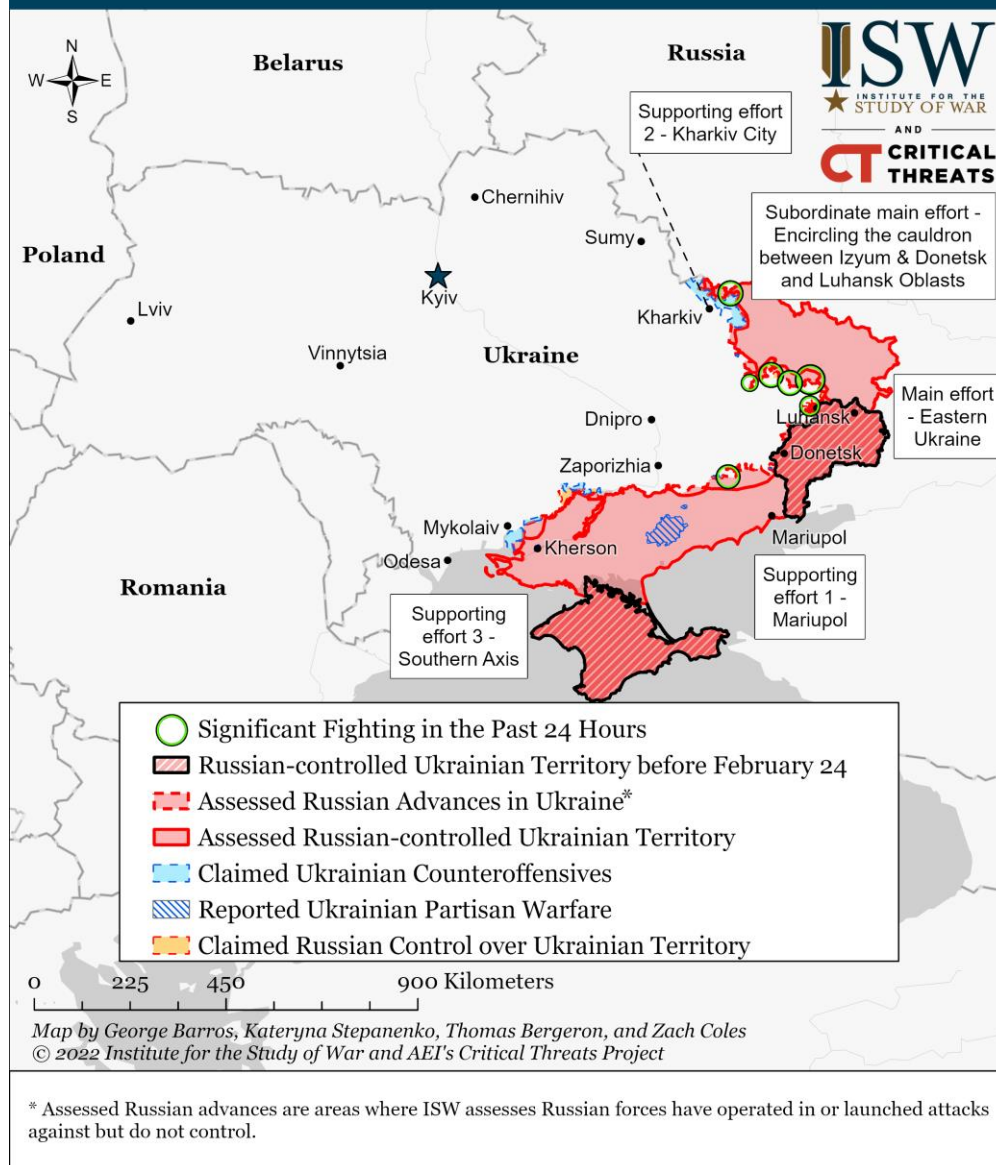
Russian forces are focusing on digging in and reinforcing defensive positions in Kharkiv and along the Southern Axis in preparation for Ukrainian counteroffensives, while the majority of active offensive operations remain confined to Izyum-Donetsk City arc and especially the

Popasna-Severodonetsk area. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces are creating secondary defensive lines on the Southern Axis, indicating that the Russian grouping in this area may be preparing for a major Ukrainian counter-offensive and a protracted conflict.^[1] Russian forces reportedly are holding defensive positions north of Kharkiv City following the success of the Ukrainian counteroffensive since May 5 and have conducted limited spoiling attacks either to give Russian forces time to complete their redeployment back to Russia in good order or to allow reinforcements to arrive to defend territory in Kharkiv Oblast. Significant Russian offensive operations are confined to the area of Severodonetsk. Russian troops have made marginal gains to the north, west, and south of the city, especially around Popasna, in order to attempt to take control of Severodonetsk.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces may have made marginal gains to the north, west, and south of Popasna in order to continue their offensive on Severodonetsk from the south.
- Russian sources may be overstating the number of Ukrainian defenders who have been evacuated from Azovstal to either maximize the number of Russian prisoners of war who may be exchanged for Ukrainian soldiers or to avoid the embarrassment of admitting they have been locked into a months-long siege against only “hundreds” of Ukrainian soldiers.
- Russian troops reportedly regained certain positions taken by the Ukrainian counteroffensive north of Kharkiv City.
- Russian forces are likely preparing for a major Ukrainian counteroffensive and protracted conflict on the Southern Axis.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 20, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 19

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan
May 19, 5:30 pm ET

Ukrainian military officials reported that some Russian troops withdrawn from the Kharkiv City axis have redeployed to western Donetsk Oblast on May 19. The Ukrainian General Staff said that 260 servicemen withdrawn from the Kharkiv City axis arrived to replace the significant combat losses that

the 107th Motorized Rifle Battalion has taken approximately 20 km southwest of Donetsk City.[1] The Ukrainian Military Directorate (GUR) intercepted a Russian serviceman's call suggesting that some of the 400 servicemen from the Kharkiv City axis who had arrived elsewhere in Donbas were shocked by the intensity of the fighting there compared with what they had experienced in Kharkiv Oblast.[2]

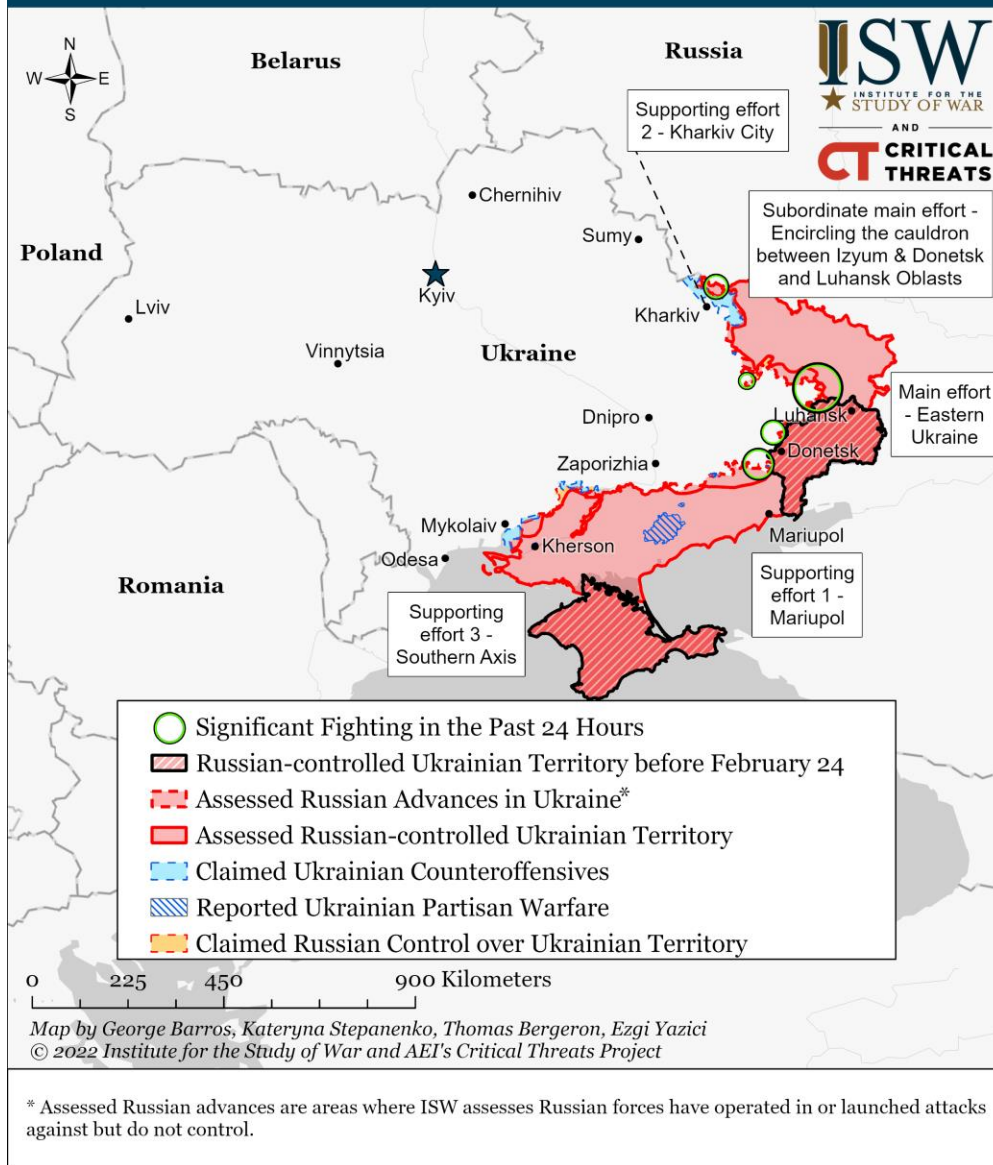
Russian forces are continuing to suffer shortages of reserve manpower, causing the Russian military command to consolidate depleted battalion tactical groups (BTGs). An unnamed US defense official reported that Russian forces still have 106 BTGs operating in Ukraine but had to disband and combine some to compensate for losses.[3] Ukrainian General Staff Main Operations Deputy Chief Oleksiy Gromov reported that Russian forces are combining units of the Pacific and Northern Fleets at the permanent locations of the 40th Separate Marine Brigade and the 200th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, respectively.[4] Gromov added that Russian forces are training servicemen in Krasnodar Krai to replenish units of the 49th Combined Arms Army and are trying to restore combat power of Russian units withdrawn from the battlefield in occupied Crimea.

Unknown Russian perpetrators conducted a series of Molotov cocktail attacks on Russian military commissariats throughout the country in May, likely in protest of covert mobilization. Russian media and local Telegram channels reported deliberate acts of arson against military commissariats in three Moscow Oblast settlements—Omsk, Volgograd, Ryazan Oblast, and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District—between May 4 and May 18.[5] Ukrainian General Staff Main Operations Deputy Chief Oleksiy Gromov said that there were at least 12 cases of deliberate arson against military commissariats in total and five last week.[6] Russian officials caught two 16-year-olds in the act in one Moscow Oblast settlement, which suggests that Russian citizens are likely responsible for the attacks on military commissariats.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are intensifying operations to advance north and west of Popasna in preparation for an offensive toward Severodonetsk.**
- **Russian and proxy authorities in Mariupol are struggling to establish coherent administrative control of the city.**
- **Russian forces reportedly attempted to regain control of the settlements they lost during the Ukrainian counteroffensive north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces are bolstering their naval presence around Snake Island to fortify their grouping on the island.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 19, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 18

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko and Karolina Hird

May 18, 6:15 pm ET

Russian occupation authorities announced plans to destroy the Azovstal Steel Plant and turn Mariupol into a resort city, depriving Russia of some of the most important economic benefits it hoped to reap by taking the city in the first place. Head of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Denis Pushilin stated that DNR authorities are planning to level Azovstal after completing its capture.^[1] Azovstal was a major element of Mariupol's economy before the war because of its unique function as a full-cycle metallurgical complex, the 10,000 jobs associated with production at the plant, the billions of dollars of foreign exchange earnings and taxes it generated, and its production output of 7,000 tons of steel, 6 million tons of iron, and 4.5 million tons of rolled metal, according to the Mariupol City Council.^[2] Pushilin stated that the DNR intends to rebuild Mariupol to be a "resort city," while admitting that 60% of the structures in Mariupol have been destroyed to the point where they cannot be rebuilt.^[3] The announced plan to turn Mariupol into a center of tourism and leisure following the complete destruction of a major center of economic activity in Mariupol, is indicative of the damage that Russian troops have inflicted on themselves through the destruction of Mariupol. Russia does not need another resort town on the Black Sea. It does need the kind of hard currency that a plant like Azovstal had generated. This announcement epitomizes the kind of Pyrrhic victories Russian forces have won in Ukraine, to the extent that they have won victories at all.

The Kremlin may hope to offset the loss of revenues from Azovstal and other destroyed infrastructure in Ukraine by profiting from the Zaporizhia Nuclear Power Plant that is forces have seized. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin announced that he will allocate maximum integration assistance for Zaporizhia Oblast to work in a "friendly Russian family" during his visit to Melitopol on May 18.^[4] Khusnullin added that the Zaporizhia Nuclear Power Plant will exclusively work for Russia and will sell electricity to Ukraine. This statement is a clear Russian recognition that there will be an independent Ukraine at the end of this war and that Russia seeks to restore its energy leverage over Ukraine and possibly the West more broadly that has been reduced by sanctions and efforts to reduce reliance on Russian energy. It also reinforces the urgency of helping Ukraine regain control of Enerhodar City and the rest of its occupied territory to forestall this renewed economic thralldom. ISW previously reported that Russian forces started digging trenches and blocking highways to Enerhodar City.^[5] The Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian occupation authorities continued to prepare for a referendum in Enerhodar City on May 18.^[6]

Ukrainian officials reported protests in Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) over forced mobilizations on May 16–17. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that relatives of the forcefully mobilized LNR servicemen demanded an immediate return of their family members from combat in Luhansk City and Rovenky approximately 50 kilometers west of Russian border.^[7] The GUR noted that perceptions of war and resentment of

mobilization in LNR worsened because of the high casualties Russian forces have suffered and the fact that Russian authorities are reportedly evading payments to the families of wounded and killed servicemen. Mariupol Mayor's Advisor Petro Andryushenko had previously reported that a protest against mobilization had occurred in Donetsk City on May 16.[\[8\]](#)

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces are continuing to inflict air and artillery strikes on the Azovstal Steel Plant, indicating that a remnant of Ukrainian defense is still in the plant despite evacuations over the last few days.
- Russian occupying authorities are reportedly planning to level the Azovstal Steel Plant after completing its capture, which directly undermines the large strategic economic importance of capturing the plant.
- Russian forces continued to prepare for an assault on Severodonetsk and intensified operations around Lyman.
- Russian forces continued to prioritize holding positions around the Russian border to prevent further Ukrainian advances north of Kharkiv City and will likely continue to do so at the expense of deploying additional reinforcements to other axes of advance.
- Russian troops focused on maintaining their positions on the Southern Axis and on conducting rocket, missile, and artillery strikes along the frontline.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 18, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 17

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Frederick W. Kagan, and George Barros

May 17, 7:00 pm ET

Mariupol defenders trapped in the Azovstal Steel Plant likely surrendered after Ukrainian officials negotiated evacuation measures with the Kremlin. Russian forces began evacuating wounded Ukrainian forces to Russian-occupied settlements in Donetsk Oblast on May 16 after the Russian

Defense Ministry proposed the agreement earlier in the day. Ukrainian officials said that they will seek to return the Mariupol defenders to Ukraine in a prisoner exchange and continue to undertake appropriate measures to rescue all Ukrainian servicemen from Azovstal.

The Kremlin might have agreed to the conditional surrender of the Azovstal defenders to accelerate Russia's ability to declare Mariupol fully under its control. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that the Russian Defense Ministry's Department of Information and Mass Communications is hastily preparing a press tour of foreign journalists through occupied territories of Ukraine between May 18 and May 21.[1] The Kremlin also could have agreed to such a deal to secure a victory in order to deflect criticism on social media of the failed Russian Siverskyi Donets River crossings and the overall slow pace of the invasion.

The Kremlin might refuse to exchange the Mariupol defenders. Some Russian State Duma members are petitioning to pass laws that would prohibit prisoner exchanges for individuals accused of "Nazism." [2] Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin claimed that the Mariupol defenders must be charged with war crimes and cannot be exchanged for Russian prisoners of war.[3] The Kremlin may ignore the Russian State Duma's concerns or use them to sabotage negotiations with Ukraine.

The surrender agreement generated some outrage and confusion on pro-Russian social media, rather than the celebration of the full capitulation of Mariupol that the Kremlin likely expected—possibly undermining Russian information operations. Some Russian Telegram channels ridiculed the Russian Defense Ministry for negotiating with Ukrainian "terrorists" and "Nazis." [4] Some bloggers criticized the Donetsk People's Republic for organizing the evacuation proceedings and blamed negotiating authorities for creating conditions for Ukrainian martyrdom.[5] Several Russian bloggers also called for the imprisonment or murder of surrendered Ukrainian servicemen.[6] Russian audiences are likely dissatisfied with the surrender agreement because they expected Russian forces to destroy Ukrainian defenders at Azovstal. The Kremlin has created large amounts of propaganda that portrayed successful Russian assaults on Azovstal without clearly setting conditions for surrender negotiations. Some Russians may find it difficult to reconcile the triumphant messaging with the abrupt negotiations leading to a negotiated surrender.

Russian forces have intensified artillery fire on Ukrainian border settlements in Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts over the past few weeks. The Ukrainian Northern Operational Command reported that Russian forces shelled the border between Sumy Oblast and Russia over 70 times on May 17.[7] Sumy Oblast Administration Head Dmytro Zhyvytskyi said that Russian saboteurs unsuccessfully attempted to break through the Ukrainian border on May 17.[8]

Key Takeaways

- **The Ukrainian military command ordered the remaining defenders of Azovstal to surrender, likely conditionally, in hopes of returning them to Ukraine as part of yet-to-be-negotiated prisoner exchanges.**
- **The announcement of the likely conditional surrender generated outrage in the Russian information space and demands in the Russian Duma for laws prohibiting exchanging the surrendered defenders of Azovstal.**
- **Russian forces continued to make limited advances in Donbas, primarily focused on setting conditions for the Battle of Severodonetsk.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 17, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 16

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

May 16, 6:00 pm ET

Russian forces conducted limited and largely unsuccessful ground offensives along the front line in Ukraine on May 16. The Russian grouping around Kharkiv City is notably trying to hold the border and prevent Ukrainian troops from advancing further north. This activity is different from previous Russian withdrawals from around Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy earlier in the war when the Russians pulled completely back to Russian territory. Russian troops may seek to retain positions in Ukraine and continue artillery strikes on Ukrainian positions in order to prevent Ukrainian forces from getting into tube or rocket-

artillery range of the outskirts of Belgorod, a major city in Russia and a key hub of the Russian military effort. The Russians might alternatively hope to conduct a counter-counter-offensive to push back south toward Kharkiv, although such an effort is highly unlikely to succeed.

Russian military bloggers continued to post analysis that is skeptical of Russian efforts and increasingly in-line with Western assessments of Russian military failures in Ukraine. One such blogger, Igor Strelkov, claimed that the Russian offensive to take Donbas has ultimately failed and that “not a single large settlement “has been liberated.[1] Strelkov even noted that the capture of Rubizhne is relatively insignificant because it happened before the new offensive in Donbas had begun. Strelkov stated that Russian forces are unlikely to liberate Donbas by the summer and that Ukrainian troops will hold their positions around Donetsk City. Strelkov notably claimed that Russian failures thus far have not surprised him because the intent of Russian command has been so evident throughout the operation that Ukrainian troops are aware of exactly how to best respond and warns that Russian troops are fighting to the point of exhaustion under “rules proposed by the enemy.” The continued disenchantment of pro-Russian milbloggers with the Russian war effort may fuel dissatisfaction in Russia itself, especially if Moscow continues to press recruitment and conscription efforts that send poorly-trained cannon-fodder to the front lines.

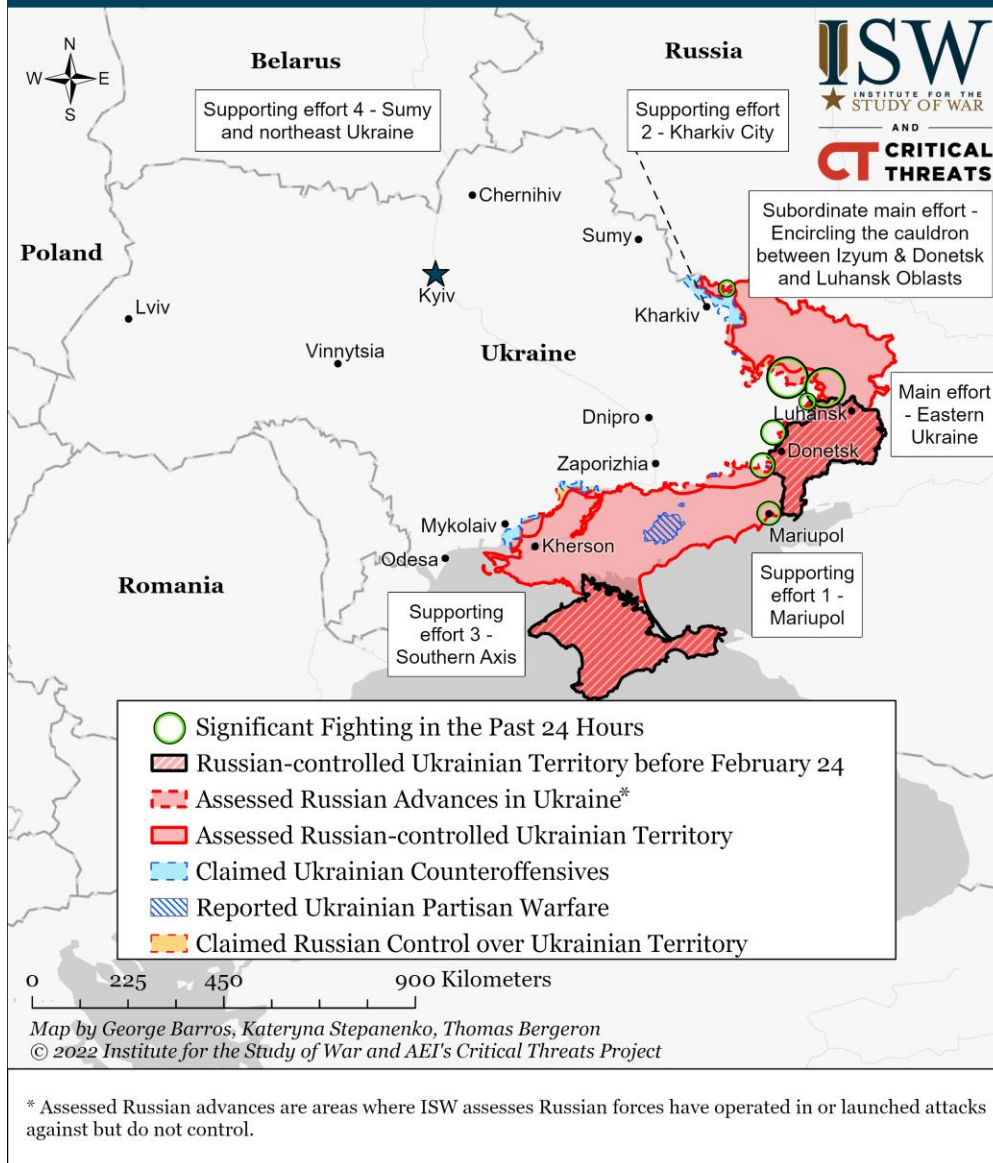
Over 260 Mariupol defenders evacuated from the Azovstal Steel Plant to Russian occupied settlements in Donetsk Oblast on May 16.[2] Ukrainian and Russian authorities negotiated evacuation for wounded Ukrainian servicemen via humanitarian corridors. Ukrainian officials previously called for the evacuation of 60 medics and critically wounded servicemen on May 13.[3] The Kremlin may extend humanitarian corridors for remaining Ukrainian defenders in an effort to fully control Mariupol.

Frictions between Russian occupation administrations and pro-Russian collaborators is growing in occupied areas of Ukraine. The Zaporizhia Oblast Military Administration reported that Russian forces are having serious conflicts with collaborators due to interpersonal power conflicts.[4] A well-known collaborator in Zaporizhia accused the Russian-installed governor of the area of stealing his 10,000 ruble compensation. Advisor to the Mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryshchenko additionally claimed that relatives of those mobilized into the forces of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) are holding a mass protest against mobilization in Donetsk City. While ISW cannot independently verify these claims, such discontent amongst occupation elements suggests a general lack of planning by Russian authorities in occupied areas, now compounded by increasingly evident Russian losses.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian and Ukrainian authorities negotiated the evacuation of 264 wounded Ukrainian servicemen from the Azovstal Steel Plant on May 16.**
- **Ukrainian forces reached the Russian border north of Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces continued unsuccessful ground operations in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and did not make any confirmed advances on May 16.**
- **Russian forces continued to fortify their positions in Zaporizhia Oblast.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 16, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 15

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Frederick W. Kagan, and George Barros
May 15, 6:30 pm ET

Russian forces have likely abandoned the objective of completing a large-scale encirclement of Ukrainian units from Donetsk City to Izyum in favor of completing the seizure of Luhansk Oblast.

Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai said that the Russian military command likely understands that it will not be able to seize Donetsk Oblast but believes that it has the capacity to reach the administrative borders of Luhansk Oblast.[1] His observations are generally consistent with our analysis. The Russian military command will likely prioritize the Battle of Severodonetsk going forward, with some efforts dedicated to disrupting Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in eastern Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces are continuing a coordinated effort to seize Severodonetsk from the north and the south, which would result in a shallower encirclement of Ukrainian troops than originally expected. The failed Russian attempts to cross the Siverskyi Donets River near Kreminna may shift Russian encirclement operations further east, closer to Severodonetsk via Rubizhne, rather than conducting a wider encirclement along multiple axes. Russian forces have also likely been scaling down advances to Slovyansk from Izyum, possibly due to the slow pace of the offensive operation there.

Russian forces have likely run out of combat-ready reservists, forcing the Russian military command to amalgamate soldiers from many different elements, including private military companies and proxy militias, into ostensibly regular army units and naval infantry.

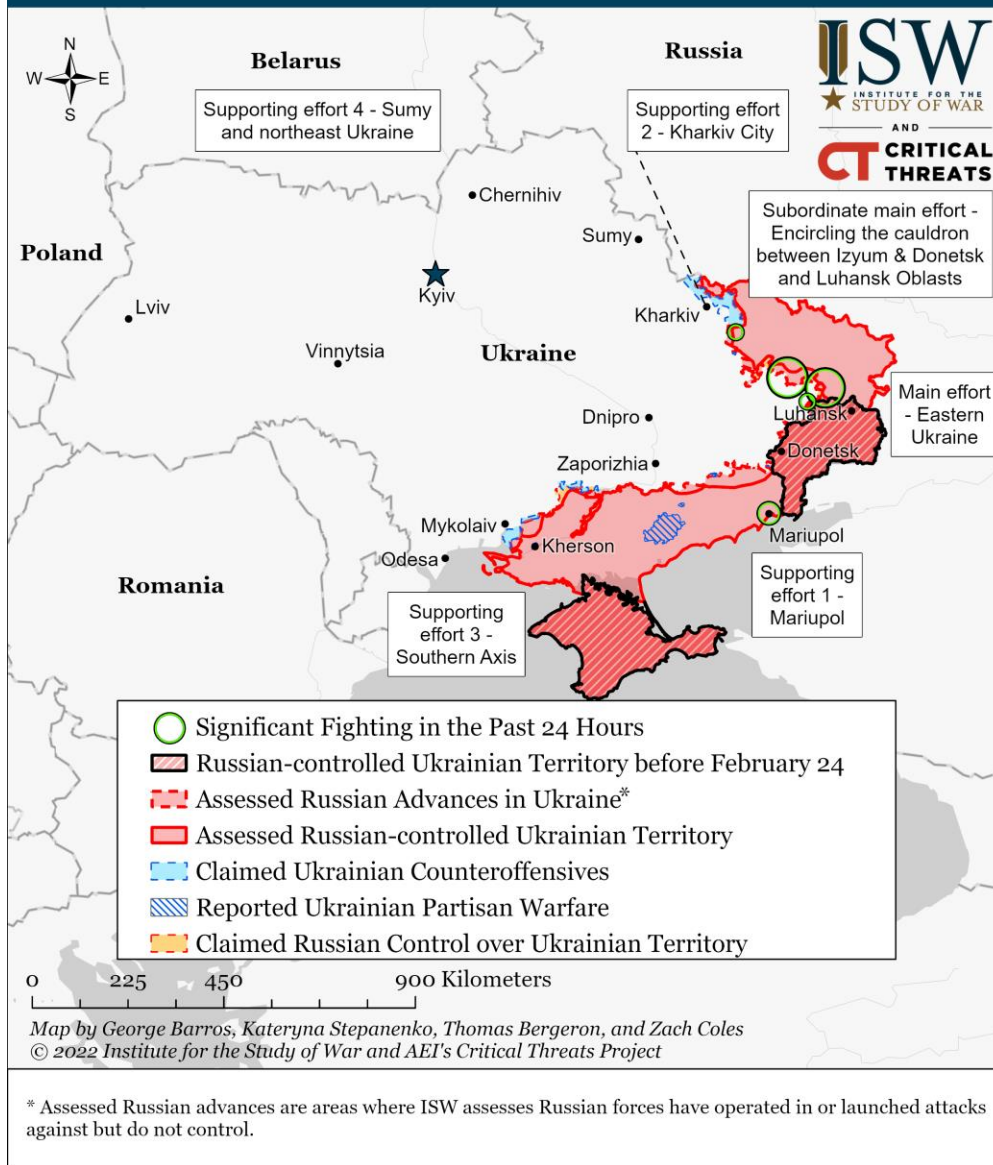
The Ukrainian General Staff reported that approximately 2,500 Russian reservists are training in Belgorod, Voronezh, and Rostov oblasts to reinforce Russian offensive operations in Ukraine. That number of reservists is unlikely to generate enough force to replenish Russian units that have reportedly lost up to 20 percent of staffing in some areas—to say nothing of the battalion tactical group that was largely destroyed recently while attempting to cross the Siverskyi Donets River.[2] The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate stated that Russian forces are conducting covert mobilization and creating new units with newly mobilized personnel who likely have insufficient training to be effective and little motivation to fight.[3] Russian forces also deployed new conscripts from occupied settlements in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to maintain an offensive around Kharkiv City, likely due to the lack of Russian reserves.[4] Russian private military companies are reportedly forming combined units with airborne elements due to significant losses in manpower.[5] Denaturing elite airborne units with mercenaries is shocking, and would be the clearest indication yet that Russia has exhausted its available combat-ready manpower reserves. The Russian 810th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade is reportedly receiving personnel from other Black Sea Fleet units, including navy ship crewmembers.[6] Newly formed or regrouped units are unlikely to be effective in combat.

Russian forces are likely fortifying occupied settlements in southern Ukraine, indicating that the Russians are seeking to establish permanent control in the region. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces began digging trenches and building concrete revetments in unspecified areas of Mykolaiv and Kherson Oblast, near Melitopol, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces will likely prioritize winning the Battle of Severodonetsk over reaching the administrative borders of Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces did not advance in the Slovyansk direction due to unsuccessful offensive operations in the Izyum area. Ukrainian aviation continues to operate north and east of Izyum.**
- **Russian forces continued to launch artillery, air, and naval assaults on the Azovstal Steel Plant, but Mariupol defenders maintained their positions.**
- **Russian forces are fortifying occupied settlements along the southern axis, indicative of Russian objectives for permanent control of the area.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 15, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 14

Kateryna Stepanenko and Frederick W. Kagan

May 14, 7:00 pm ET

The Ukrainian destruction of significant elements of a Russian motorized rifle brigade that tried to cross a pontoon bridge over the Siverskyi Donets River on May 11 has shocked prominent

Russian milbloggers. Those bloggers have begun commenting on the incompetence of the Russian military to their hundreds of thousands of followers. The attempted river crossing showed a stunning lack of tactical sense as satellite images show (destroyed) Russian vehicles tightly bunched up at both ends of the (destroyed) bridge, clearly allowing Ukrainian artillerymen to kill hundreds and destroy scores of vehicles with concentrated strikes. The milbloggers who have hitherto been cheering on the Russian military criticized Russian armed forces leadership for failing to learn from experience in the war. They also expressed the concern that the constant pushing of Russia's propaganda lines was making it hard for them to understand what was actually going on.

The effects of this change in tone and discourse by these milbloggers are uncertain but could be potent. People living under tightly censored regimes often trust individuals who seem to be independent of but generally aligned with the government more than the government line (even more than do citizens of democratic societies). The commentary by these widely read milbloggers may fuel burgeoning doubts in Russia about Russia's prospects in this war and the competence of Russia's military leaders (at least).

The destruction of the motorized rifle elements may also severely disrupt Russian efforts to isolate Severodonetsk and Lysychansk from the north. Russian troops made no attempts to advance in that area in the last 24 hours.

Russian forces continued operations to set conditions for the Battle of Severodonetsk from the south, however, advancing on the town of Zolote, roughly 30 km south of Severodonetsk. Russian troops likely seek to secure the highway north from Zolote to Severodonetsk for their advance, but they may also seek to cut the last highway linking Severodonetsk with the rest of Ukraine via Bakhmut. They could try to strike northwest across the country from their current positions to cut that highway closer to Lysychansk and Severodonetsk. The Russians are extremely unlikely to be able to take Bakhmut but they may be able to cut or render unusable the highway from Bakhmut to Severodonetsk if they can advance far enough along either of these possible routes.

Ukrainian forces will likely conduct counteroffensive operations to dislodge the Russians from around Izyum, according to Ukrainian officials. We have previously noted that Russian artillery fire directed to the west from around Izyum was more likely intended to disrupt such a counter-offensive than to set conditions for a Russian attack.

Russian forces continued their withdrawal from Kharkiv Oblast but will likely seek to hold a line east of Vovchansk to secure the ground line of communication (GLOC) running from Belgorod through Vovchansk to Izyum. The terrain in this area generally favors the defender, and the Russians have other GLOCs with which to supply Izyum, so the Ukrainians may not try to advance much farther to the east at this time.

Ukrainian defenders continued to fight in the Azovstal Plant in Mariupol despite horrific conditions and continued Russian attacks. The Ukrainian defense of Azovstal is still tying down Russian combat forces and inflicting casualties.

Key Takeaways

- **Catastrophic Russian losses in a failed river crossing and the military incompetence displayed in that crossing have shaken the confidence of some prominent Russian milbloggers.**
- **Russian forces continue shaping operations for the Battle of Severodonetsk from the south even though those losses have at least temporarily disrupted their efforts from the north.**
- **Ukrainian forces announced that they will conduct a counteroffensive around Izyum.**
- **Russian forces continued to withdraw from northern Kharkiv Oblast, but will likely seek to hold a line defending their ground lines of communication from Belgorod via Vovchansk to Izyum.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 14, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Annexation of Occupied Ukraine Is Putin's Unacceptable "Off-Ramp"

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

By Katherine Lawlor and Mason Clark
May 13, 2022

Key Takeaway: Russian President Vladimir Putin likely intends to annex occupied southern and eastern Ukraine directly into the Russian Federation in the coming months. He will likely then state, directly or obliquely, that Russian doctrine permitting the use of nuclear weapons to defend Russian territory applies to those newly annexed territories. Such actions would threaten Ukraine and its partners with nuclear attack if Ukrainian counteroffensives to liberate Russian-occupied territory continue. Putin may believe that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would restore Russian deterrence after his disastrous invasion shattered Russia's conventional deterrent capabilities.

Putin's timeline for annexation is likely contingent on the extent to which he understands the degraded state of the Russian military in Ukraine. The Russian military has not yet achieved Putin's stated territorial objectives of securing all of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and is unlikely to do so. If Putin understands his military weakness, he will likely rush annexation and introduce the nuclear deterrent quickly in an attempt to retain control of the Ukrainian territory that Russia currently occupies. If Putin believes that Russian forces are capable of additional advances, he will likely delay the annexation in hopes of covering more territory with it. In that case, his poor leadership and Ukrainian counteroffensives could drive the Russian military toward a state of collapse. Putin could also attempt to maintain Russian attacks while mobilizing additional forces. He might delay announcing annexation for far longer in this case, waiting until reinforcements could arrive to gain more territory to annex.

Ukraine and its Western partners likely have a narrow window of opportunity to support a Ukrainian counteroffensive into occupied Ukrainian territory before the Kremlin annexes that territory. Ukraine and the West must also develop a coherent plan for responding to any annexation and to the threat of nuclear attack that might follow it. The political and ethical consequences of a longstanding Russian occupation of southeastern Ukraine would be devastating to the long-term viability of the Ukrainian state. Vital Ukrainian and Western national interests require urgent Western support for an immediate Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 13

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko and Frederick W. Kagan

May 13, 7:00 pm ET

The Russian military has likely decided to withdraw fully from its positions around Kharkiv City in the face of Ukrainian counteroffensives and the limited availability of reinforcements. Russian units have generally not attempted to hold ground against counterattacking Ukrainian forces over the past several days, with a few exceptions. Reports from Western officials and a video from an officer of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) indicate that Moscow is focused on conducting an orderly withdrawal and prioritizing getting Russians back home before allowing proxy forces to enter Russia rather than trying to hold its positions near the city.

Ukraine thus appears to have won the Battle of Kharkiv. Ukrainian forces prevented Russian troops from encircling, let alone seizing Kharkiv, and then expelled them from around the city, as they did to Russian forces attempting to seize Kyiv. Ukrainian forces will likely attempt to disrupt at least the westernmost of the ground lines of communication (GLOCs) between Belgorod and Russian forces concentrated around Izyum, although Russia is using several GLOCs, including some further away from current Ukrainian positions than any Ukrainian counteroffensive is likely to reach soon. The terrain east of current Ukrainian positions may also favor the Russians attempting to defend their GLOCs, as large water features canalize movement and create chokepoints that the Ukrainians would have to breakthrough.

Russian troops continued efforts to advance all along the periphery of the Izyum-Donetsk city salient but made little progress. Russian forces attempted a ground offensive from Izyum that made no progress. We had previously hypothesized that Russia might give up on attempts to advance from Izyum, but the Russians have either not made such a decision or have not fully committed to it yet.^[1] Small-

scale and unsuccessful attacks on the southern end of the salient near Donetsk City continued but made no real progress.

The main Russian effort continues to be the attempt to encircle Severodonetsk and Lysychansk from the north and from the south. Russian troops attacking from Popasna to the north made no significant progress in the last 24 hours. Russian forces coming north-to-south have failed to cross the Siverskyi Donets River and taken devastating losses in their attempts. The Russians may not have enough additional fresh combat power to offset those losses and continue the offensive on a large enough scale to complete the encirclement, although they will likely continue to try to do so.

The Ukrainian defenders of Mariupol continue to fight despite the odds, although Russian attackers appear to have penetrated into the Azovstal facility.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukraine has likely won the Battle of Kharkiv.** Russian forces continued to withdraw from the northern settlements around Kharkiv City. Ukrainian forces will likely attempt to disrupt Russian ground lines of communication to Izyum.
- **Ukrainian forces have likely disrupted the Russian attempt to cross the Siverskyi Donets River in force, undermining Russian efforts to mass troops in northern Donbas and complete the encirclement of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk.**
- **Russian forces have likely secured the highway near the western entrance to the Azovstal Steel Plant but fighting for the facility continues.**
- **Russian forces in Zaporizhia Oblast are likely attempting to reach artillery range outside Zaporizhia City.**
- **Ukrainian forces are reportedly attempting to regain control of Snake Island off the Romanian coast or at least disrupt Russia's ability to use it.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 13, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 12

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan
May 12, 6:45 ET

Russian forces may be abandoning efforts at a wide encirclement of Ukrainian troops along the Izyum-Sloviansk-Debaltseve line in favor of shallower encirclements of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk. Russian forces likely control almost all of Rubizhne as of May 12 and have likely seized

the town of Voevodivka, north of Severodonetsk.[1] They will likely launch a ground offensive on or around Severodonetsk in the coming days. The relative success of Russian operations in this area combined with their failure to advance from Izyum and the notable decline in the energy of that attempted advance suggest that they may be giving up on the Izyum axis. Reports that Russian forces in Popasna are advancing north, toward Severodonetsk-Lysychansk, rather than east toward the Slovyansk-Debaltseve highway, support this hypothesis.

It is unclear if Russian forces can encircle, let alone capture, Severodonetsk and Lysychansk even if they focus their efforts on that much-reduced objective. Russian offensives have bogged down every time they hit a built-up area throughout this war, and these areas are unlikely to be different. Continued and expanding reports of demoralization and refusals to fight among Russian units suggest that the effective combat power of Russian troops in the east continues to be low and may drop further. If the Russians abandon efforts to advance from Izyum, moreover, Ukrainian forces would be able to concentrate their efforts on defending Severodonetsk-Lysychansk or, in the worst case, breaking a Russian encirclement before those settlements fall.

The Ukrainian counteroffensive around Kharkiv is also forcing the Russian command to make hard choices, as it was likely intended to do. The UK Ministry of Defense reports that Russian forces pulled back from Kharkiv have been sent toward Rubizhne and Severodonetsk but at the cost of ceding ground in Kharkiv from which the Russians had been shelling the city.[2] The counteroffensive is also forcing Russian units still near the city to focus their bombardment on the attacking Ukrainian troops rather than continuing their attacks on the city itself. The Ukrainian counteroffensive near Kharkiv is starting to look very similar to the counteroffensive that ultimately drove Russian troops away from Kyiv and out of western Ukraine entirely, although it is too soon to tell if the Russians will make a similar decision here.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces made marginal gains to the north of Severodonetsk and have likely captured Rubizhne and Voevodivka.**
- **Russian forces fired intensively on Ukrainian positions in northern Kharkiv to stop the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive around Kharkiv City. The artillery focus on Ukrainian positions has likely diverted the Russian artillery that remains in range of Kharkiv to the more urgent task of stopping the Ukrainian advance.**
- **Russian forces are strengthening their position on Snake Island in an effort to block Ukrainian maritime communications and capabilities in the northwestern Black Sea on the approaches to Odesa.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 12, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 11

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

May 11, 5:30pm ET

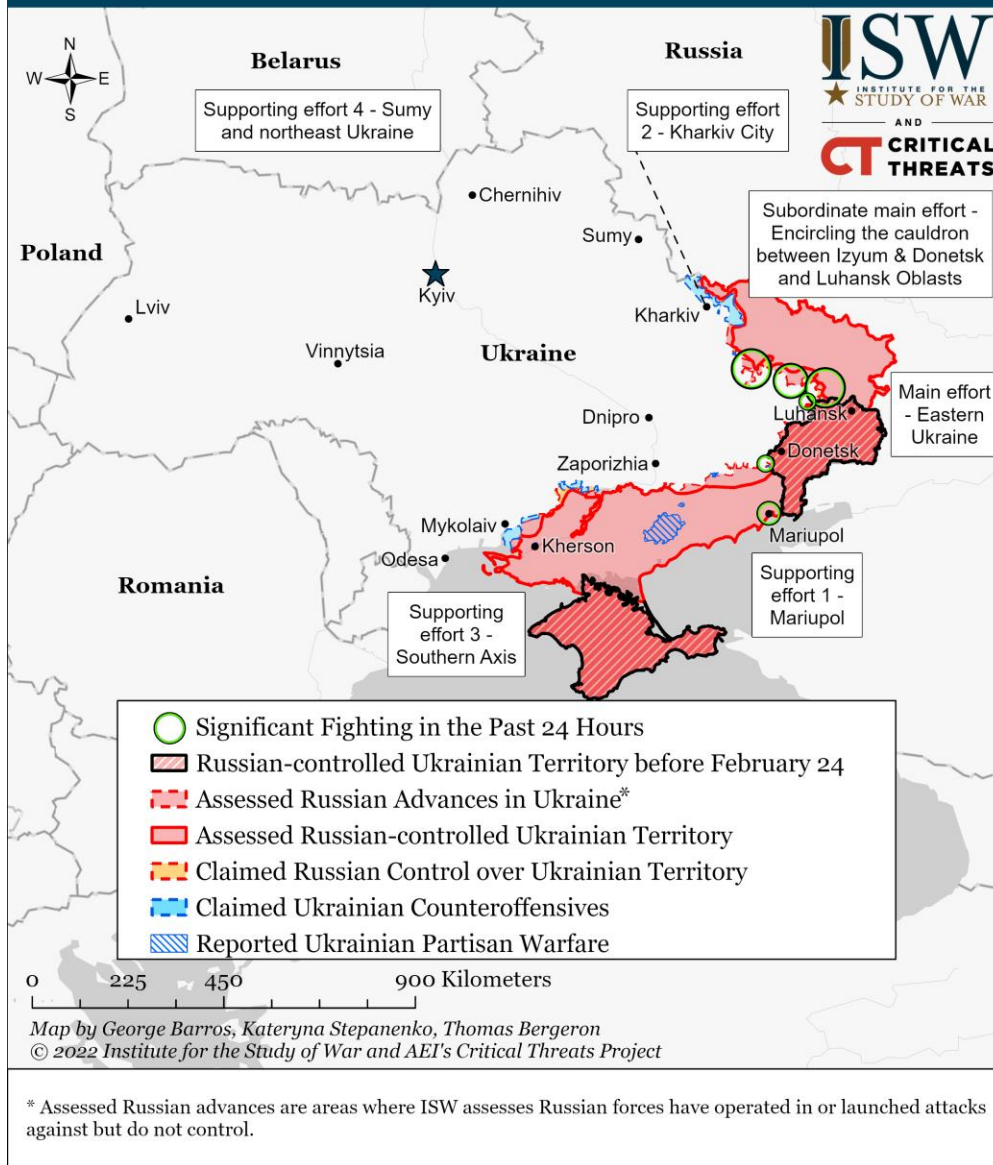
Russian forces did not make any significant advances anywhere in Ukraine on May 11, and Ukrainian forces took further ground northeast of Kharkiv. The Ukrainian counteroffensive north of Kharkiv City has forced Russian troops onto the defensive and necessitated reinforcement and replenishment efforts intended to prevent further Ukrainian advances towards the Russian border. Russian efforts along the Southern Axis and in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts remain similarly stalled,

and Russian forces have not made any significant gains in the face of continued successful Ukrainian defenses.

Key Takeaways

- **The Ukrainian counteroffensive north of Kharkiv City has forced Russian troops onto the defensive and has successfully alleviated artillery pressure on Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces continued efforts to encircle Ukrainian positions in the Severodonetsk-Rubizhne-Lysychansk area but did not make any confirmed advances.**
- **Russian forces may be initiating a new advance towards Bakhmut after capturing Popasna in order to secure highway access north to Slovyansk.**
- **Russian forces are attempting to consolidate their positions in western Kherson Oblast to push into Mykolaiv Oblast.**
- **Pro-Russian Telegram sources reported Ukrainian forces may be conducting a counterattack 40km north of Izyum to cut off Russian units in this key town, though ISW cannot confirm these reports at this time.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 11, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 10

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

May 10, 7:15pm ET

The Ukrainian counteroffensive north of Kharkiv City continued to successfully push Russian forces toward the Russia-Ukraine border on May 10. Ukrainian forces liberated several towns north of Kharkiv City and continued pushing north of the recently liberated Staryi Saltiv to capture several towns

northeast of Kharkiv: a Russian source claimed that Ukrainian troops advanced to within 10km of the Russian border, though ISW cannot independently confirm these specific claims.[1] Russian forces from the Izyum area are reportedly redeploying northwards to attempt to alleviate the pressure of this counteroffensive and stymie further northward advances toward the Russian border.[2] The Ukrainian counteroffensive will likely continue to divert Russian troops and resources from deployment to other axes of advance where fighting has been similarly stalled out by the successful Ukrainian defense. The counteroffensive will impede the ability of Russian artillery to target the northeastern suburbs of Kharkiv City, will potentially enable Ukrainian forces to threaten Russian rear areas with their own shelling and further attacks, and—if Ukrainian forces are able to further advance the counteroffensive or Russian forces collapse along the Kharkiv axis and withdraw further—unhinge Russian offensive operations around Izyum.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense escalated its false claims of US and NATO preparations to attack Belarus while announcing the start of a second stage of ongoing military exercises on May 10. However, Belarus remains unlikely to join the war in Ukraine. Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin announced the second stage of ongoing rapid response forces exercises on May 10 in response to what he falsely claimed were NATO escalations.[3] Belarusian First Deputy Minister of Defense Victor Gulevich accused the US and its allies of building up a military presence around Belarusian borders and claimed that Poland and the Baltic states are threatening Belarusian territory through reconnaissance, sabotage, and special operations.[4] Gulevich announced that Belarusian battalion tactical groups (BTGs) will subsequently advance to the Western and Northwestern operational zones as part of a "whole range of measures aimed at countering possible threats" in these areas.[5] Gulevich additionally stated that the presence of 20,000 Ukrainian troops in Belarus' Southern Operational District have necessitated a deployment of unspecified Belarusian troops to three tactical directions near the Ukrainian border, which is consistent with Ukrainian General Staff reporting that certain Belarusian units have deployed to the Ukraine-Belarus border area for a combat readiness check.[6]

The rhetoric of threats to Belarus' borders is not new and was frequently employed by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in the early stages of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[7] The Belarusian exercises, which are concentrated on Belarus' borders with Poland and the Baltic States rather than Ukraine, are likely primarily demonstrative and signal Belarus' continued political support for Russia's war in Ukraine. The exercises are likely additionally intended to draw NATO attention and possibly disrupt NATO aid to Ukraine, rather than threatening an actual military operation—similar to Russian efforts to destabilize Moldova that are likely intended to distract Romania and NATO rather than directly threaten Odesa. Belarus remains unlikely to join the war in Ukraine. Lukashenko successfully repressed domestic opposition in 2020 and 2021 but remains vulnerable to further domestic unrest if his security apparatus weakens; he is likely unwilling to risk losing his military in a stalled and deteriorating Russian war in Ukraine.

Key Takeaways

- **The Ukrainian counteroffensive in northern Kharkiv took further ground and have possibly closed to within 10km of the Russian border.**
- **Belarusian authorities are escalating rhetoric accusing NATO and the US of threatening Belarusian borders, but Belarus remains unlikely to join the war.**
- **Russian operations around Izyum remain stalled.**
- **DNR and Russian forces are advancing efforts to consolidate their control of the ruins of Mariupol, including reportedly attempting to reopen steel plants to produce military equipment.**
- **Russian forces in eastern Ukraine continued attempts to encircle the Severodonetsk area and reportedly reached the Donetsk-Luhansk administrative border from Popasna.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces did not conduct any significant attacks on the southern axis.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 10, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 9

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Mason Clark

May 9, 7:15pm ET

Russian forces continue to face widespread force generation challenges. A senior US defense official stated on May 9 that the US has not observed any indicators of a “new major Russian mobilization” and that members of the private military company Wagner Group “urgently” requested hundreds of thousands of additional troops to reinforce Russian efforts in Donbas. The official noted that Russia currently has 97 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) in Ukraine, but that BTGs have been moving in and out of Ukraine to refit and resupply, suggesting that Russian troops continue to sustain substantial

damage in combat. ISW has previously assessed that most Russian BTGs are heavily degraded and counting BTGs is not a useful metric of Russian combat power. The Main Ukrainian Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed that under-trained, ill-equipped Russian conscripts are still being sent into active combat despite the Kremlin denying this practice. A prisoner of war from the BARS-7 detachment of the Wagner Group claimed that a "covert mobilization" is underway in Russia to send conscripts to clean damage caused by combat in the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.

Russian troops in Ukraine continue to display low morale and poor discipline as fighting in many areas has stalled out against Ukrainian resistance. A senior US defense official claimed that Russian troops in Donbas are failing to obey orders from top generals. Russian forces deployed to the Zaporizhzhia area reportedly are experiencing very low morale and psychological conditions, complain about the ineffectiveness of operations in the area, frequently abuse alcohol, and shoot at their own vehicles in order to avoid going to the frontline. This is consistent with reports made by the Ukrainian General Staff that the extent of Russian losses is having widespread impacts on the willingness of Russian troops to engage in offensive operations.

Russian authorities are likely setting conditions to integrate occupied Ukrainian territories directly into Russia, as opposed to creating proxy "People's Republics." The Kherson occupation Deputy Chairman of Military Civil Administration Kirill Stremousov stated on May 9 that the Kherson region intends to become part of Russia and that Kherson authorities do not intend to hold a referendum to create an independent republic. Spokesperson for the Ukrainian Defense Ministry Oleksandr Motuzyanyk reported that Russian occupation authorities are intensifying reconnaissance measures and increasing checkpoints and patrols in occupied areas in order to prepare to integrate these regions directly into Russia. Motuzyanyk noted that Russian and Crimean groups have been arriving to occupied regions to intensify propaganda measures to prepare for integration. ISW will publish our assessment of the Kremlin's most likely course of actions towards their occupied territories in Ukraine in the coming days.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces did not make any confirmed advances to the southeast or southwest of Izyum on May 9 but are likely attempting to concentrate the forces necessary to resume offensive operations in the coming days.**
- **Russian forces made marginal gains around Severodonetsk in the past 24 hours.**
- **Russian forces are likely continuing to amass troops in Belgorod Oblast to stop Ukrainian counterattacks around Kharkiv City from reaching the Ukrainian-Russian border.**
- **Russian units in Zaporizhzhia Oblast are regrouping and will likely receive reinforcements from forces previously deployed in Mariupol.**
- **The Kremlin continues to face severe force mobilization challenges, and ongoing "covert mobilization" efforts are unlikely to generate substantial combat power.**
- **Russian authorities are likely setting conditions to integrate occupied Ukrainian territories directly into Russia, as opposed to creating proxy "People's Republics."**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 9, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Putin's Victory Day Speech Forgoes an Opportunity to Escalate Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Katherine Lawlor and Mason Clark

May 9, 2022

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin used his May 9 speech to praise ongoing Russian efforts in Ukraine and reinforce existing Kremlin framing rather than announcing a change. He did not announce an escalation or declare victory in the Russian war in Ukraine.
- Putin likely calculated that he could not ask the Russian population for a greater commitment to the war effort and implicitly reassured the Russian people that he would not ask for a greater societal commitment in his speech.
- Putin may be recognizing the growing risks he faces at home and in Ukraine and may be adjusting his objectives, and his desired end state in Ukraine, accordingly.
- The Kremlin has already scaled down its objectives in Ukraine (from its initial objective of capturing Kyiv and full regime change) and will likely do so again—or be forced to do so by Ukrainian battlefield successes.
- Regardless of any change—or lack thereof—in the Kremlin's objectives, Putin's speech indicates that the Kremlin has likely decided to maintain its current level of resourcing in the war.
- The Kremlin attempted to demonstrate the alleged popularity of its occupation of eastern Ukraine through forced Victory Day celebrations in occupied Ukrainian territories.

Russian President Vladimir Putin used his May 9 speech to praise ongoing Russian efforts in Ukraine and reinforce existing Kremlin framing rather than announce a change. He did not announce an escalation or declare victory in the Russian war in Ukraine.[1] May 9, Victory Day, is Russia's most important patriotic holiday and commemorates the Soviet victory in the Second World War, known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War. Putin's much-anticipated speech was a ready-made opportunity for him to alter the Kremlin's current framing of the war in Ukraine or announce a policy change. Putin had three general options for his Victory Day address: declare some sort of Russian victory, make a policy change to ramp up the war effort in some way (such as by calling for a larger-scale mobilization or formally declaring war on Ukraine), or what he chose—to pursue a steady state narrative and reinforce the Kremlin's existing framing (and resourcing) of the war.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 8

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

May 8, 4:00 pm ET

Russian forces did not make any significant advances on any axis of advance on May 8. The Ukrainian counteroffensive northeast of Kharkiv City has likely forced Russian troops to redeploy to Kharkiv instead of reinforcing stalled Russian offensive operations elsewhere in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces are continuing their attempt to reach the administrative borders of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts but have not made substantial territorial gains since securing Popasna on May 7.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces are likely amassing in Belgorod to reinforce Russian efforts in northern Kharkiv to prevent the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive from pushing closer to the Ukraine-Russia border.
- Russian forces near Izyum focused on regrouping, replenishing, and reconnoitering Ukrainian positions in order to continue advances to the southwest and southeast of Izyum.
- Russian forces continued their ground attacks to drive to the borders of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts but did not make any territorial gains
- Russian troops continued to assault the Azovstal Steel Plant and advanced efforts to economically integrate occupied Mariupol into the wider Russian economy.
- Russian troops may be preparing for a renewed offensive on the Southern Axis but are unlikely to be successful in this endeavor.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 8, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 7

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, Karolina Hird, and Kateryna Stepanenko

May 7, 6:45 pm ET

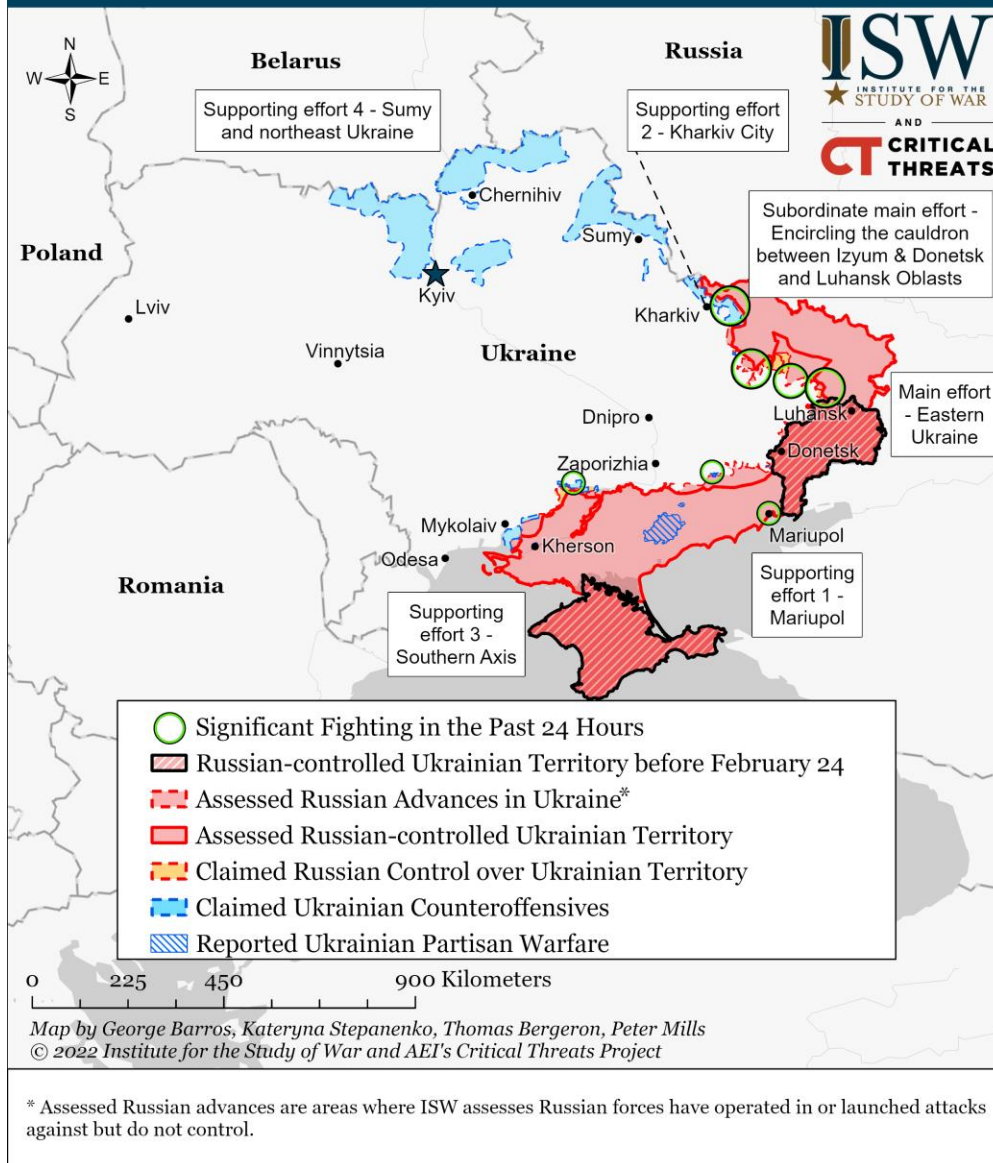
The Ukrainian counteroffensive northeast of Kharkiv is making significant progress and will likely advance to the Russian border in the coming days or weeks. Russian forces may be conducting a limited withdrawal in the face of successful Ukrainian attacks and reportedly destroyed three bridges to slow the Ukrainian advance. Armies generally only destroy bridges if they have largely decided they will not attempt to cross the river in the other direction anytime soon; Russian forces are therefore unlikely to launch operations to retake the northeast outskirts of Kharkiv liberated by Ukrainian forces in the near future. Russian forces previously destroyed several bridges during their retreat from Chernihiv Oblast—as did Ukrainian forces withdrawing in the face of the Russian offensive in the initial days of the war. This Ukrainian offensive is likely intended to push Russian forces out of artillery range of Kharkiv city and drive to the border of Russia's Belgorod Oblast. As ISW previously forecasted, the Ukrainian counteroffensive is forcing Russian units intended for deployment elsewhere to redeploy to the Kharkiv front to halt Ukrainian attacks. Given the current rate of Ukrainian advances, Russian forces may be unable to prevent Ukrainian forces from reaching the Russian border, even with additional reinforcements. Ukrainian forces are not directly threatening Russian lines of communication to Izyum (and ISW cannot verify claims of a separate Ukrainian counteroffensive toward Izyum at this time), but the Ukrainian counteroffensive demonstrates promising Ukrainian capabilities and may set conditions for further offensive operations into northeastern Kharkiv Oblast.

By all indications, Russian forces will announce the creation of a Kherson People's Republic or possibly forcibly annex Kherson Oblast in the near future and are intensifying occupation measures in Mariupol. Russian forces are reportedly increasing their security presence in both Kherson and Mariupol, including withdrawing personnel from frontline combat units to protect Russian dignitaries in Mariupol. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Leader Denis Pushilin arrived in Kherson on May 6, and local occupation officials stated the region will "strive to become a subject of Russia" and "will resemble something close to Crimea in terms of the pace of development," echoing longstanding rhetoric used by Russia's existing proxies in eastern Ukraine. As ISW has previously assessed, the Kremlin will likely form illegal proxy republics or directly annex occupied areas of southern and eastern Ukraine to cement its occupation administration and attempt to permanently strip these territories from Ukraine.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces destroyed several bridges to slow Ukrainian forces and may be conducting a limited withdrawal northeast of Kharkiv city in the face of the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive.**
- **Ukrainian forces are making significant progress around Kharkiv and will likely advance to the Russian border in the coming days.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to repel Russian advances toward Barvinvoke and Russian forces have likely abandoned efforts to drive directly southeast toward Slovyansk. ISW cannot confirm claims of a Ukrainian counteroffensive toward Izyum at this time.**
- **Russian forces claimed to capture Popasna on May 7 but remain largely stalled in eastern Ukraine.**
- **The Ukrainian government confirmed the last remaining civilians trapped in the Azovstal plant evacuated on May 7, though the remaining Ukrainian defenders appear unlikely to surrender. ISW will likely be unable to report any discrete changes in control of terrain until Russian forces capture the plant as a whole due to the poor information environment in Mariupol.**
- **By all indications, Russian forces will announce the creation of a Kherson People's Republic or possibly forcibly annex Kherson Oblast in the coming weeks to cement its occupation administration and attempt to permanently strip these territories from Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces continued to target Odesa with cruise missile strikes and conduct false-flag attacks in Transnistria over the past several days.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 7, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 6

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark and George Barros
May 6, 5:00 pm ET

The Ukrainian counteroffensive north and east of Kharkiv city secured further gains in the last 24 hours and may successfully push Russian forces out of artillery range of Kharkiv in the coming days. Ukrainian forces captured several settlements north and east of Kharkiv in the last 24 hours, reducing the ability of Russian forces to threaten Ukraine's second-largest city. This Ukrainian operation

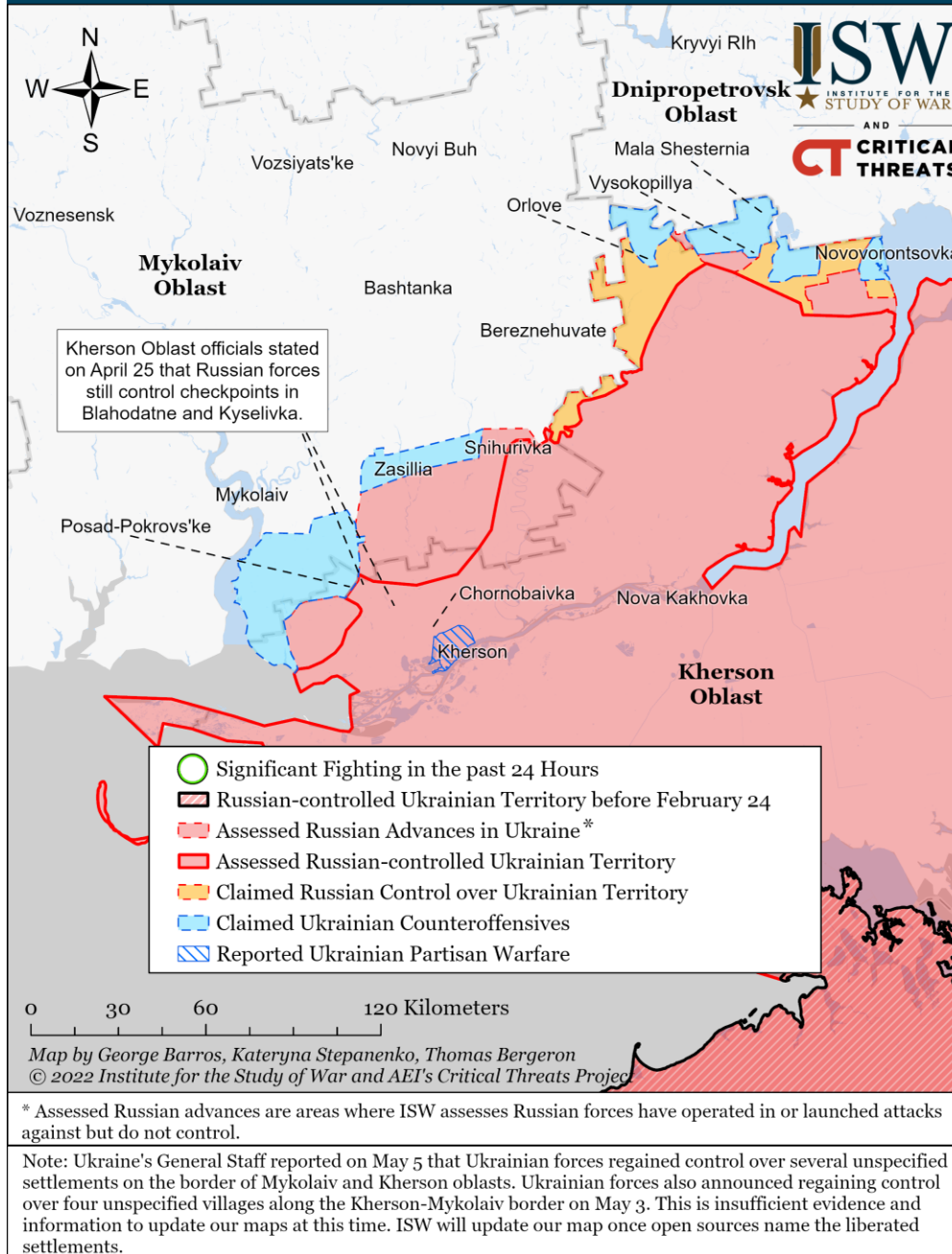
is developing into a successful, broader counteroffensive—as opposed to the more localized *counterattacks* that Ukrainian forces have conducted throughout the war to secure key terrain and disrupt Russian offensive operations. Ukrainian forces are notably retaking territory along a broad arc around Kharkiv rather than focusing on a narrow thrust, indicating an ability to launch larger-scale offensive operations than we have observed so far in the war (as Ukrainian forces predominantly retook the outskirts of Kyiv following Russian withdrawals rather than in a major counteroffensive). The willingness of Ukrainian forces to concentrate the forces necessary for this scale of offensive operations, rather than deploying these available forces to defenses in eastern Ukraine, additionally indicates the Ukrainian military's confidence in repelling ongoing Russian operations to encircle Ukrainian forces in the Severodonetsk area. While Ukrainian forces are unlikely to directly threaten Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum (as they run further to the east of recent Ukrainian advances), Ukrainian forces may be able to relieve Russian pressure on Kharkiv and possibly threaten to make further advances to the Russian border.

ISW cannot confirm initial reports of a Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missile strike on the Russian frigate *Admiral Makarov* on May 6.^[1] Pentagon Spokesperson John Kirby said the United States cannot confirm the reported strike and added “we’ve been looking at this all day.”^[2] ISW will update this assessment with further information as it becomes available.

Key Takeaways

- **The Ukrainian counteroffensive along a broad arc north and east of Kharkiv city took further terrain and will likely push Russian forces out of tube artillery range of the city in the coming days. The ability—and willingness—of the Ukrainian military to concentrate the forces in Kharkiv necessary to conduct this operation indicates Ukrainian confidence in repelling ongoing Russian attacks with their existing forces in the region.**
- **Russian forces did not make any progress on the Izyum axis.**
- **Russian forces likely secured small gains on the outskirts of Severodonetsk in the last 24 hours but are unlikely to successfully surround the town.**
- **Russian forces continued assaults on the Azovstal plant, but ISW cannot confirm any specific advances. Likely widespread civilian resistance to the Russian occupation may additionally be disrupting previously announced Russian plans to conduct a Victory Day exhibition in Mariupol.**
- **There were no significant changes on the southern axis in the last 24 hours and Russian forces continued to reinforce their forward positions.**
- **ISW cannot confirm reports of a Ukrainian anti-ship missile strike on the *Admiral Makarov* at this time.**

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of May 6, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 5
[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, and George Barros
May 5, 7:00 pm ET

The Ukrainian counteroffensive out of Kharkiv city may disrupt Russian forces northeast of Kharkiv and will likely force Russian forces to decide whether to reinforce positions near Kharkiv or risk losing most or all of their positions within artillery range of the city. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zalozhnyi stated on May 5 that Ukrainian forces are transitioning to counteroffensive operations around Kharkiv and Izyum, the first direct Ukrainian military statement of a shift to offensive operations. Ukrainian forces did not make any confirmed advances in the last 24 hours but repelled Russian attempts to regain lost positions. Russian forces made few advances in continued attacks in eastern Ukraine, and Ukrainian forces may be able to build their ongoing counterattacks and successful repulse of Russian attacks along the Izyum axis into a wider counteroffensive to retake Russian-occupied territory in Kharkiv Oblast.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued ineffectual offensive operations in southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts without securing any significant territorial gains in the past 24 hours.**
- **Ukrainian officials and military officers confirmed that Russian forces have breached the Azovstal facility itself and confirmed that Ukrainian forces are losing ground. Russian forces will likely capture the facility in the coming days.**
- **Ukrainian offensive operations around Kharkiv likely intend to push Russian forces out of artillery range of Kharkiv city, force Russian units to redeploy from the Izyum axis, and potentially threaten Russian lines of communication.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations toward Zaporizhia City but did not conduct any attacks in Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts in the last 24 hours. Ukrainian forces claimed to recapture additional territory west of Kherson, but ISW cannot independently confirm any advances.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 5, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Ukraine Invasion Update 25

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

with AEI's Critical Threats Project

May 5, 2022

Key Takeaways April 22-May 4

- The Kremlin is establishing economic, governmental, and informational control over occupied Ukrainian territory, indicating that Russia may be preparing to create a series of Russian proxy “people’s republics” and/or to directly annex some occupied Ukrainian territory.
- The Kremlin continues to falsely claim that Ukraine is stalling negotiations that the Kremlin is also not seriously pursuing.
- Ukraine may suspend negotiations entirely in the coming weeks in response to Russian-sponsored “independence referendums” in occupied Ukrainian territory.
- Russian forces are likely considering the use of chemical weapons to achieve battlefield advantages in the battle for Donbas.
- Russian false-flag attacks in Transnistria and missile attacks in Odesa likely do not indicate an imminent Russian escalation in Transnistria or Moldova. The Kremlin likely intends to pin Ukrainian forces in the south to prevent them from reinforcing eastern Ukraine.
- The Kremlin is likely attempting to consolidate control over and surveillance of Russian government officials.
- The Kremlin continues to project economic confidence to its domestic audience despite a Russian Central Bank report that Russia’s economy will constrict by 8-10% in 2022
- The Kremlin made an example out of Poland and Bulgaria by cutting off natural gas shipments in an attempt to coerce Germany, Italy, and other EU consumers of Russian natural gas to pay for their Russian gas imports in rubles, thereby propping up Russia’s sanctions-battered economy.
- NATO and EU countries continued supplying Ukraine with military assistance, including high-end capabilities to counter Russian aggression, as Sweden and Finland consider NATO membership.
- The Kremlin’s antisemitism may drive Israel away from its current neutral position on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 3](#)

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and Mason Clark

May 4, 7:15pm ET

Ukrainian defenses have largely stalled Russian advances in Eastern Ukraine. Russian troops conducted a number of unsuccessful attacks in Eastern Ukraine on May 4 and were unable to make any confirmed advances. Russian forces attacking south of Izyum appear increasingly unlikely to successfully encircle Ukrainian forces in the Rubizhne area. Ukrainian forces have so far prevented Russian forces from merging their offensives to the southeast of Izyum and the west of Lyman, Slovyansk, and Kramatorsk, as Russian forces likely intended.

Russian forces reportedly entered the Azovstal Steel Plant – rather than its outskirts – for the first time on May 4. The extent of this Russian advance remains unclear, and Russian forces likely face further costly fighting if they intend to clear the entire facility. The Kremlin likely hopes that the successful capture of Azovstal through a ground assault will cement the Kremlin’s growing effort to claim complete control of Mariupol by May 9, with Russian propagandists recently arriving in the city to set conditions for further claims of a Russian victory. The Kremlin likely intends to claim some sort of victory in Mariupol to present a success to the Russian people, though Russian forces are highly unlikely to halt offensive operations across Ukraine on this date.

Russian forces intensified airstrikes against transportation infrastructure in Western Ukraine on May 4 but remain unable to interdict Western aid shipments to Ukraine. Six Russian cruise missiles hit electrical substations near railway stations in Lviv and Transcarpathia (the southwestern Oblast of Ukraine) on May 4. A senior US defense official reported that Russian aircraft conducted 200 to 300 airstrikes largely targeting transportation infrastructure in the last 24 hours. The US official added that these Russian strikes are likely intended disrupt Ukrainian transportation capabilities and slow down weapon re-supply efforts but have been unable to do so.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces engaged in several unsuccessful ground offensives to the south of Izyum and did not significantly advance efforts to encircle Ukrainian troops in the cauldron to the southeast of Izyum and west of the Donetsk-Luhansk frontline.
- Russian forces reportedly stormed the Azovstal Steel Plant on May 4 and are likely operating inside the plant's facilities.
- Russian and Ukrainian sources confirmed that a Ukrainian counteroffensive pushed Russian troops back 40 kilometers from Kharkiv City.
- Russian forces conducted a number of unsuccessful counteroffensives on the southern axis.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 4, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 3

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

May 3, 6:45 pm ET

Ukrainian officials reported with increasing confidence that the Kremlin will announce mobilization on May 9. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate Chief Kyrylo Budanov said on May 2 that the Kremlin has begun to prepare mobilization processes and personnel ahead of the expected May 9 announcement and has already carried out covert mobilization.[1] Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council said that high-ranking Russian officials are trying to legitimize a prolonged war effort as the Third World War against the West, rather than the "special military operation" against Ukraine, as Russian President Vladimir Putin has hitherto framed Russia's invasion.[2] ISW has no independent confirmation of Russian preparations for mobilization.

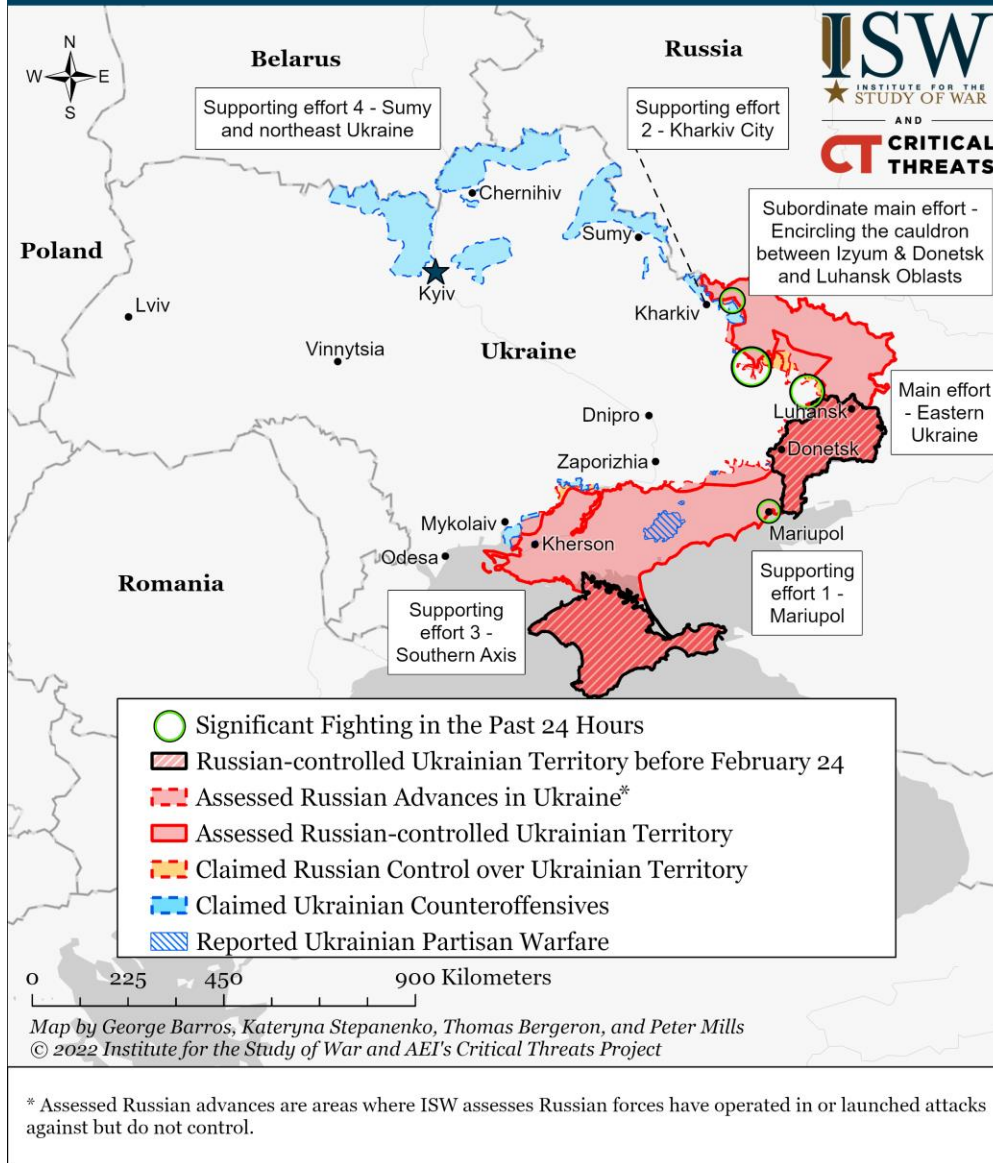
A significant Ukrainian counteroffensive pushed Russian forces roughly 40 km east of Kharkiv City.[3] A senior American defense official reported the Ukrainian operation, which is consistent with social media reports from both Ukrainian and Russian sources that Ukrainian troops took control of Staryi Saltiv on May 2.[4] This Ukrainian counteroffensive is very unlikely to affect Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum, as the Russians have not been relying on GLOCs from Kharkiv to support their operations in Izyum but have been using routes further to the east and well beyond the most recent Ukrainian counteroffensive's limit of advance. The Ukrainian counteroffensive may, however, unhinge the Russian positions northeast of Kharkiv and could set conditions for a broader operation to drive the Russians from most of their positions around the city. This possibility may pose a dilemma for the Russians—whether to reinforce their positions near Kharkiv to prevent such a broader Ukrainian operation or to risk losing most or all of their positions in artillery range of the city.

Russia's long-term intentions regarding the status of Mariupol and other occupied areas seem confused. Some anecdotes from Mariupol indicate that Russia may plan to incorporate Mariupol and the surrounding environs into the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), and possibly annex the DNR to the Russian Federation. Other anecdotes suggest that Russia could directly absorb Mariupol into Rostov Oblast. These inconsistencies could simply be artifacts of reporting or confusion on the ground, but they could also indicate actual confusion about Russia's long-term plans for governing the Ukrainian regions that Moscow's forces currently occupy. **These anecdotes clearly support the assessment that Putin has no intention of ceding occupied territories back to an independent Ukraine and is, at most, considering exactly how he intends to govern regions that Russia has illegally seized.**

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces resumed air, artillery, and ground assaults on the Azovstal Steel Plant following the conclusion of the May 2 evacuation efforts.
- Russian forces continued to regroup on the Donetsk-Luhansk axis in likely preparation for a westward advance in the direction of Lyman and Slovyansk.
- The Ukrainian Armed Forces conducted a counteroffensive that likely pushed Russian forces up to 40 km east of Kharkiv City.
- Russian forces conducted limited ground offensives in Zaporizhia Oblast in the vicinity of Huliapole and intensified reconnaissance operations in the vicinity of Odesa amid growing tensions in Transnistria.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 3, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 2

Click here to read the full report.

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

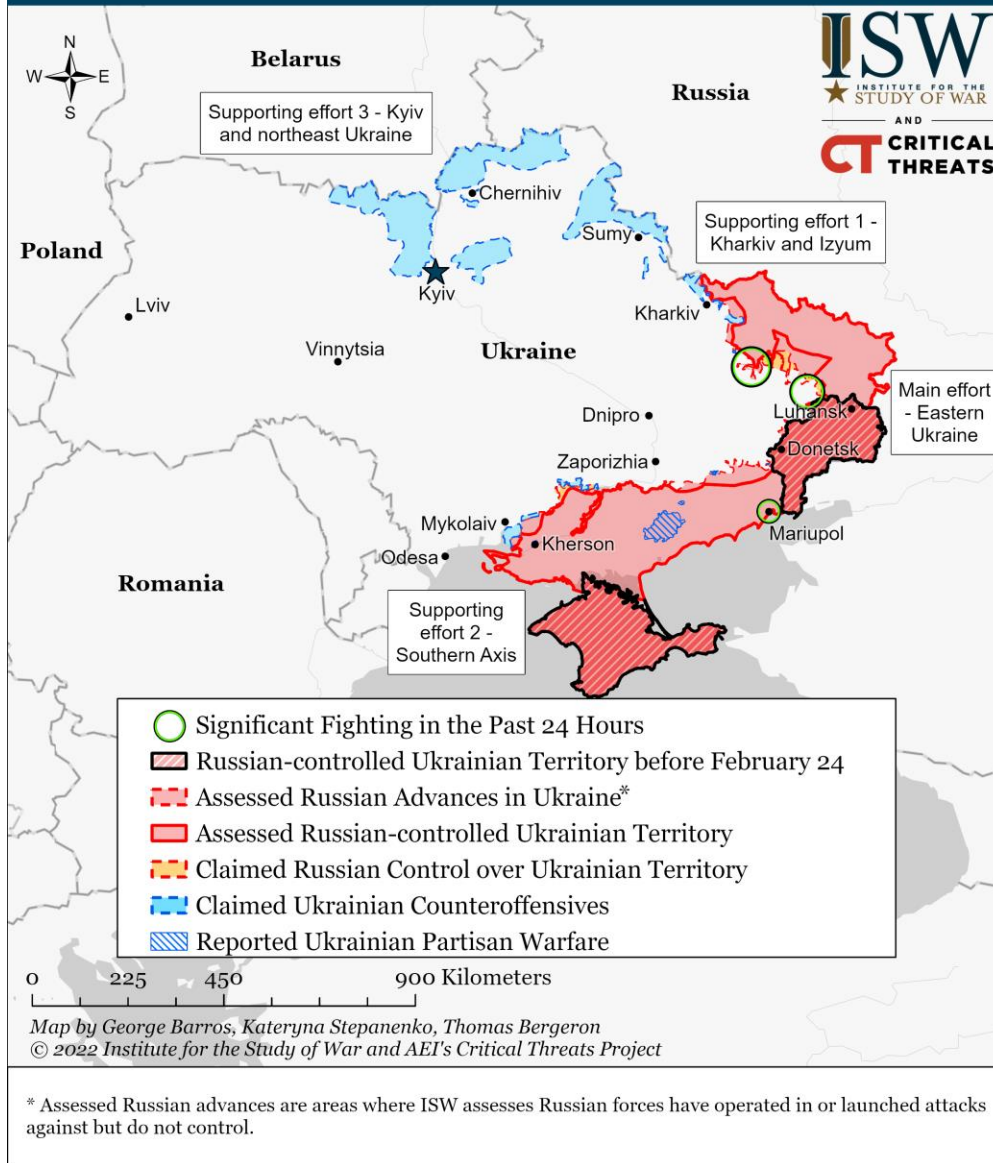
May 2, 5:15 pm ET

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in Ukraine on May 2. The April 30 Ukrainian artillery strike on the Russian command post in Izyum may be continuing to disrupt Russian efforts on the Izyum axis. Russian troops on the Donetsk-Luhansk frontline and Southern Axis continued to regroup, likely in preparation for renewed offensives or to resist or reverse Ukrainian counter-offensives.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks along any axes of advance and instead shelled Ukrainian positions on the frontlines.**
- **The April 30 Ukrainian artillery strike on Russian command headquarters near Izyum likely disrupted Russian operations on the Izyum axis and may hinder Russian offensives from Izyum for the next few days.**
- **Russian forces on the Southern Axis continued to regroup and reconnoiter likely in preparation for ground assaults in the direction of Kryvyi Rih, Mykolaiv, and Zaporizhia.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 2, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 1

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan
May 1, 6:15 ET

Russian forces are setting conditions to establish permanent control over the areas of southern Ukraine they currently occupy, either as nominally independent “People’s Republics” or by annexing them to Russia. Russian sources reported that stores in occupied Melitopol and Volnovakha are beginning to transition to using the Russian ruble.[1] British Defense Intelligence reported that the ruble will be used in Kherson City starting on May 1 as part of a 4-month currency transition scheme enacted by the occupation administration.[2] These measures, which are not necessary or normal in military occupation administrations, indicate that Russian President Vladimir Putin likely intends to retain control over these areas and that his ambitions are not confined to Donbas.

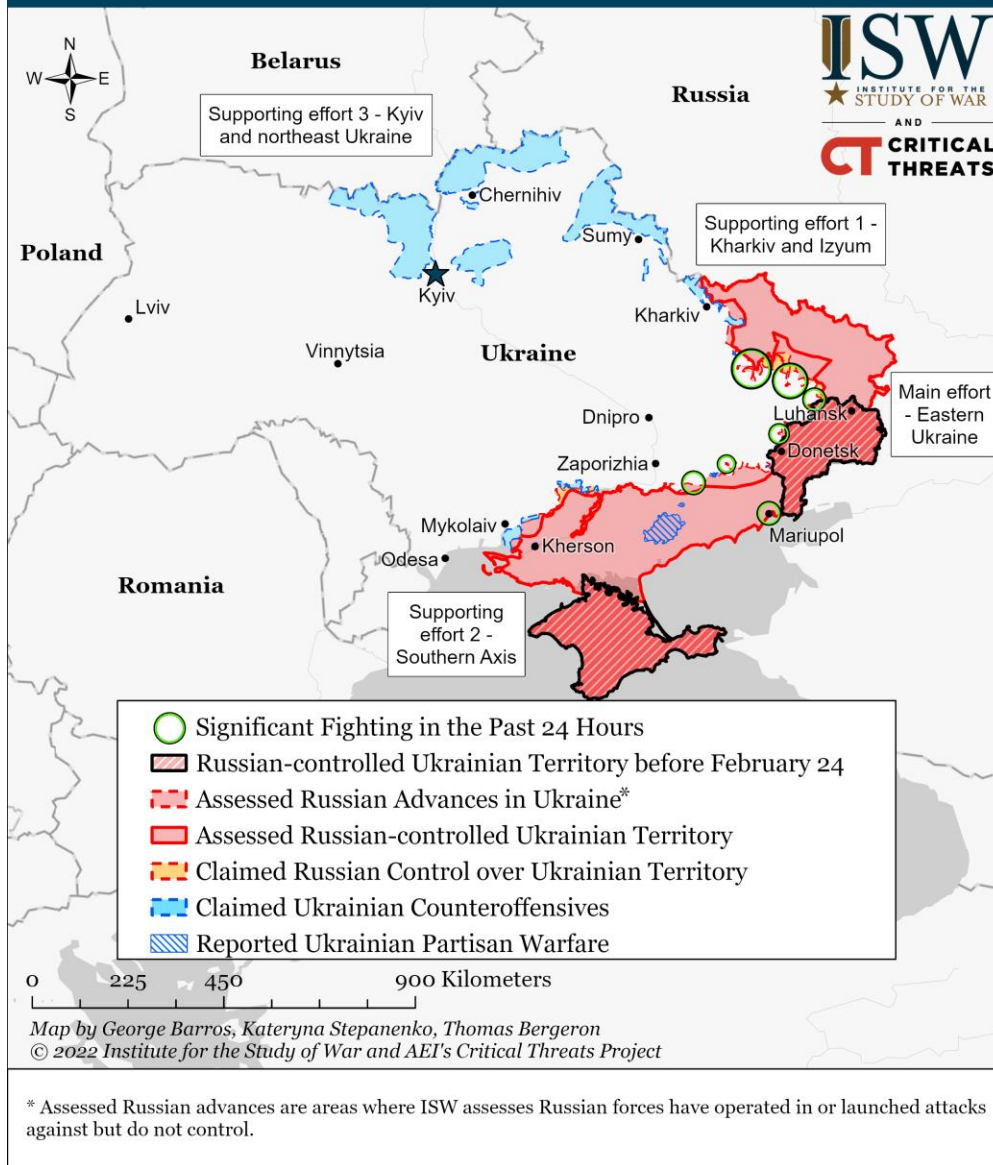
Western and Ukrainian sources claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin may announce a “general mobilization” of the Russian military on May 9th. British Defense Minister Ben Wallace claimed that Putin may make this announcement, although Wallace admitted this was a personal opinion and not based on intelligence.[3] Advisor to the Ukrainian President Mikhail Podolyak amplified Wallace’s claims and stated that a general mobilization on May 9 would be consistent with the economic imperatives faced by Russia as a result of the invasion of Ukraine.[4] ISW has no independent verification of these claims, which would not in any event generate large numbers of usable soldiers for many months.

The Kremlin likely seeks to leverage its partners in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to evade Western sanctions. The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russia is courting CSTO members to procure input goods and materials for dual-use technologies that Russia cannot directly purchase due to Western sanctions.[5] The GUR stated that this effort will increase CSTO members’ economic dependence on Russia and enable Russian sanction evasion by using third-party countries to re-export Russian products to international markets.[6] The GUR stated that the Russian Ulyanovsk Mechanical Plant is attempting to obtain German components needed for the production of Buk surface-to-air missile systems and Tunguska missiles via Kazakhstan. Western sanctions may need to target Russia’s partners in the CSTO and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) customs union to prevent Russian sanctions evasion.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian occupying forces are setting conditions to allow Russia to permanently govern occupied areas in southern Ukraine, not just in Donbas.**
- **Ukrainian forces likely conducted a rocket artillery strike on a Russian command post in Izyum on April 30 that struck after Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov had left but killed other senior Russian officers.**
- **Russian forces continue to make incremental advances moving southwestward in the direction of Lyman but are largely stalled against Ukrainian positions on the pre-February 24 frontline.**
- **Russian forces continued re-grouping and reconnaissance on the Southern Axis and did not make any confirmed advances.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of May 1, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 30

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

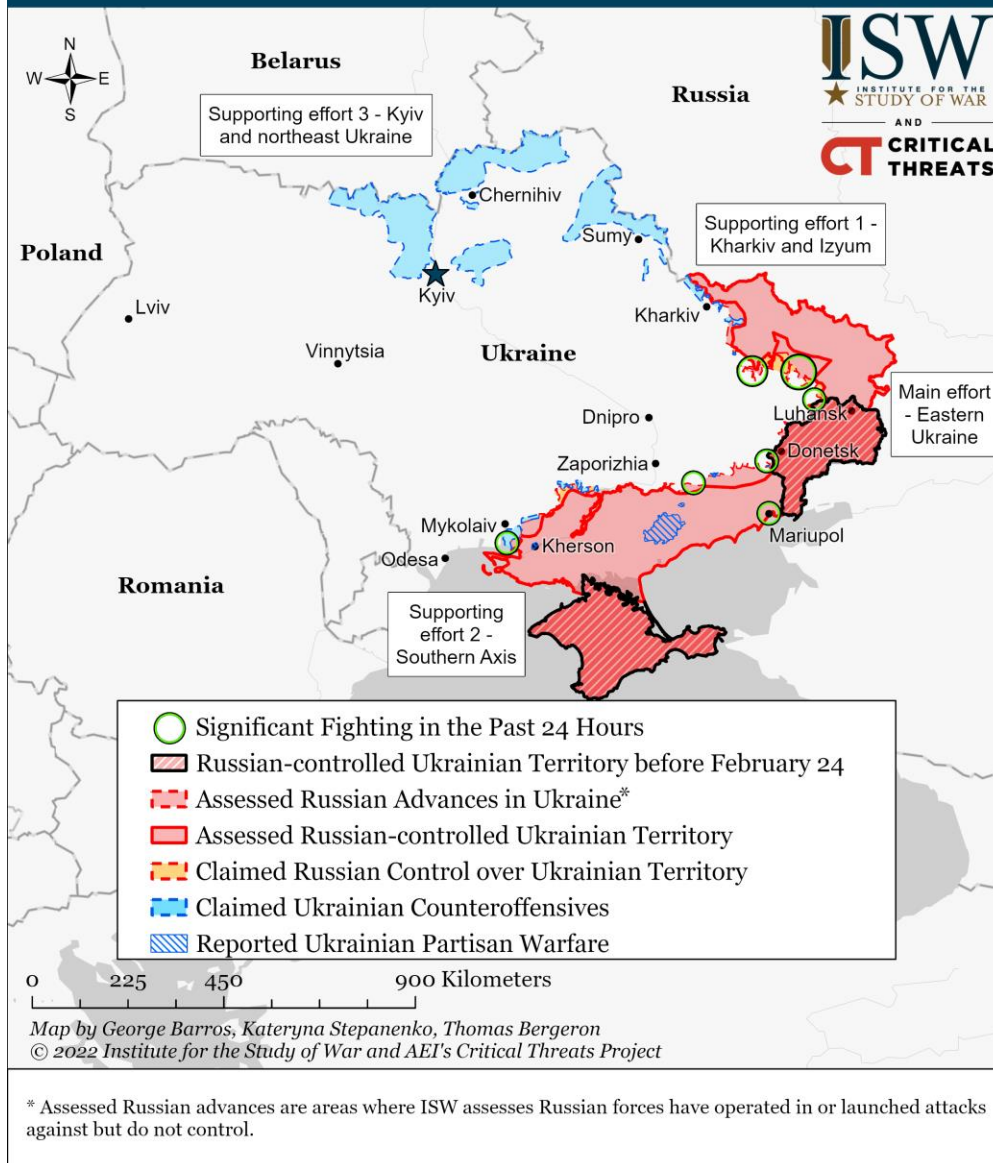
Mason Clark, Karolina Hird, and George Barros
April 30, 5:15pm ET

Further Russian reinforcements to the Izyum axis are unlikely to enable stalled Russian forces to achieve substantial advances. Elements of unspecified Eastern Military District units and several air-defense assets are reportedly deploying from Belgorod to the Izyum front to support likely degraded Russian units attempting to advance south of the city. These forces are unlikely to enable Russian forces to break the current deadlock, as Russian attacks remain confined to two major highways (toward Slovyansk and Barvinkove) and cannot leverage greater numbers. Several successful Ukrainian counterattacks out of Kharkiv city in the last 72 hours have additionally recaptured a ring of suburbs north and east of the city and may additionally force Russian forces to redeploy units intended for the Izyum axis to hold these positions. Russian forces appear increasingly unlikely to achieve any major advances in eastern Ukraine, and Ukrainian forces may be able to conduct wider counterattacks in the coming days.

Key Takeaways

- **A Ukrainian counteroffensive out of Kharkiv City will likely alleviate pressure on parts of the city that have suffered the most from Russian shelling and may force Russian troops from Izyum to re-deploy northward to support forces maintaining the partial encirclement of Kharkiv.**
- **Additional Russian forces are deploying to the Izyum front but are unlikely to enable any major advances.**
- **Russian troops did not make any confirmed advances to the southwest or southeast of Izyum or to the west of the Donetsk-Luhansk frontline.**
- **Russian forces in Kherson are pausing major offensive operations to improve their tactical positions and regroup to prepare for a renewed offensive to capture the administrative borders of Kherson.**
- **Russian occupation forces in Mariupol announced plans to consolidate their control over the city and intend to return Ukrainian citizens forcibly deported into Russia at some point in the future.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 30, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 29

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Mason Clark, and George Barros

April 29, 6:15pm ET

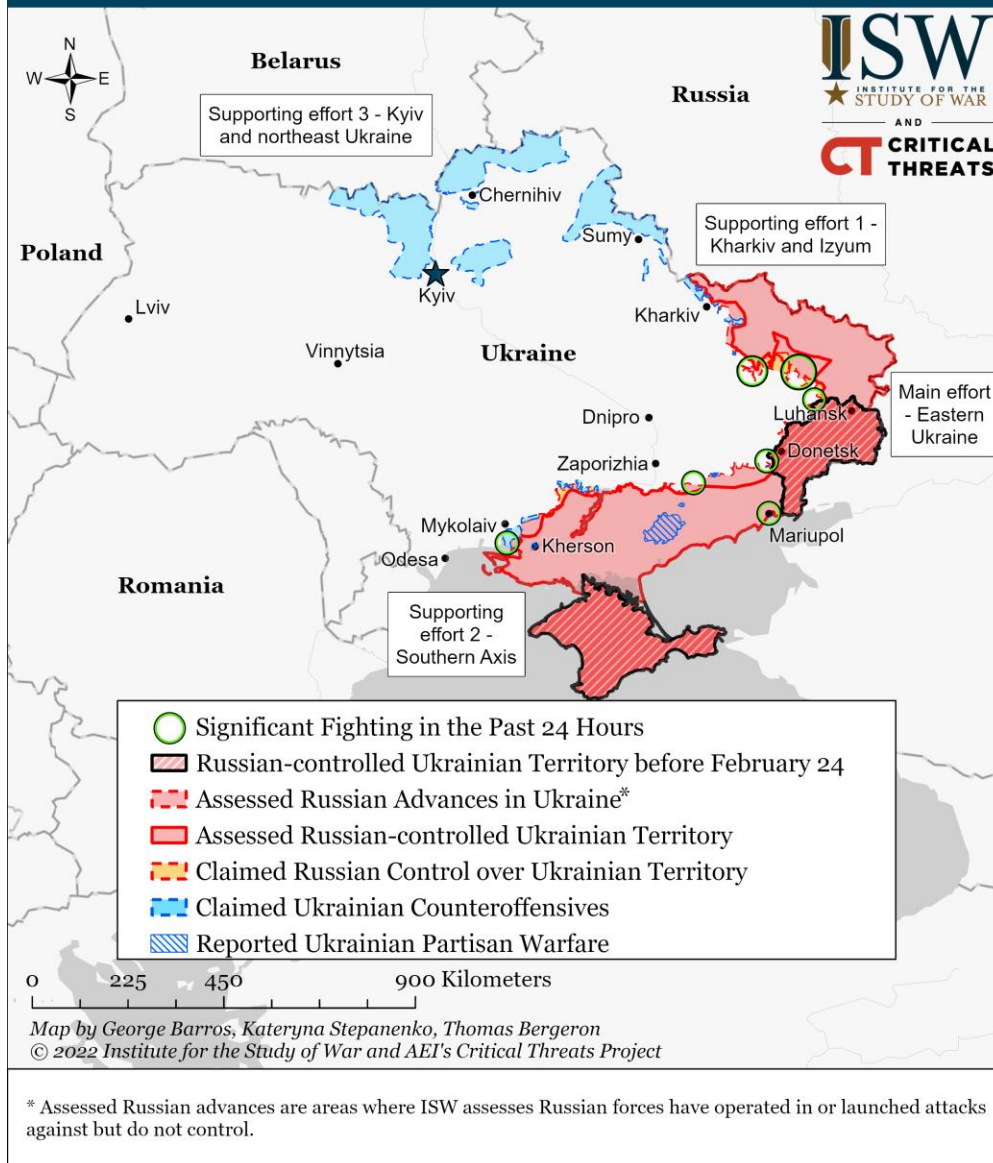
Russian forces made limited advances west of Severodonetsk on April 29 but remain stalled south of Izyum. Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine are likely successfully conducting a maneuver defense rather than holding static positions, redeploying mechanized reserves to resist attempted

Russian advances. Concentrated Russian artillery is enabling minor Russian advances, but Ukrainian positions remain strong. Limited Ukrainian counterattacks around Kharkiv city may additionally force Russian forces to redeploy units intended for the Izyum axis to hold these positions.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces likely intend to leave a minimal force in Mariupol necessary to block Ukrainian positions in Azovstal and prevent partisan actions and are deploying as much combat power as possible to support offensive operations elsewhere.**
- **Ukrainian forces are successfully slowing Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine, which secured only minor advances west of Severodonetsk and did not advance on the Izyum front in the last 24 hours.**
- **Ukrainian counterattacks in Kharkiv are unlikely to develop into a major counteroffensive in the coming days but may force Russia to redeploy forces intended for the Izyum axis to hold their defensive positions around the city.**
- **Ukrainian intelligence continued to warn that Russian false flag attacks in Transnistria are intended to draw Transnistria into the war in some capacity and coerce Moldova to abandon pro-European policies.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 28

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

April 28, 5:45pm ET

Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine made minor advances on April 28. Russian forces attacking southwest from Izyum likely seek to bypass Ukrainian defenses on the direct road to Slovyansk. Russian forces continued shelling and minor attacks along the line of contact in eastern Ukraine but did not secure any gains in the past 24 hours. Additional Russian reinforcements continue to deploy to

Belgorod to support the Izyum advance. Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol's Azovstal Steel Plant continue to hold out against heavy Russian artillery and aerial bombardment, including the likely use of multi-ton "bunker-buster" bombs against a Ukrainian field hospital.

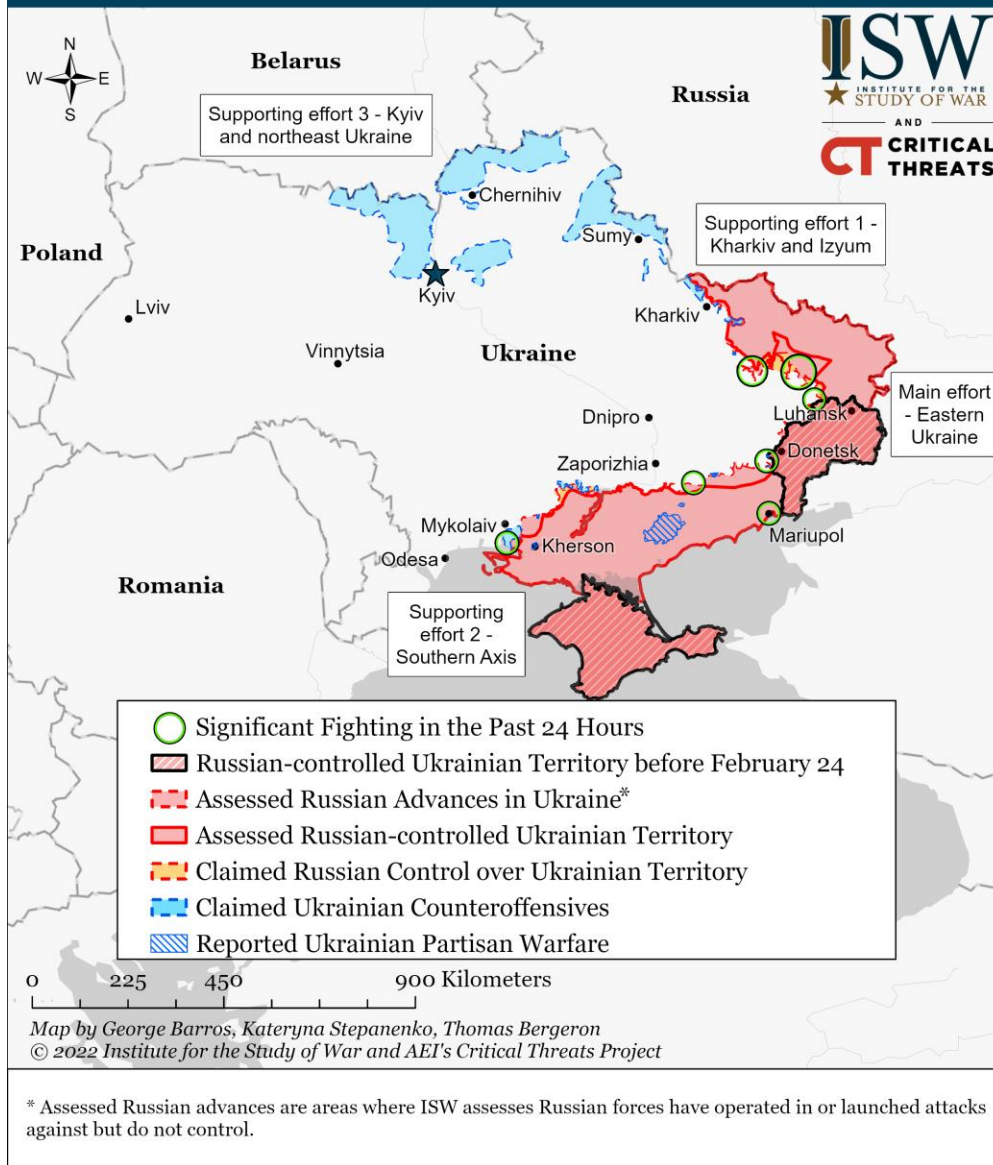
Ukrainian news outlet Defense Express reported on April 27 that Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov will take personal command of the Russian offensive in the Izyum direction.

[1] Citing unspecified Ukrainian military sources, Defense Express stated that Gerasimov is already in-theater and will command the offensive "at the operational and tactical level" and claimed the Russian military failed to create a single command structure under Southern Military District Commander Alexander Dvornikov. ISW cannot independently confirm this report. However, ISW previously assessed that Dvornikov's appointment as overall commander in Ukraine would not solve Russia's command and control challenges and likely strain his span of control.[2] If confirmed, the appointment of Russia's senior general officer to command tactical operations indicates both the importance of the Izyum drive to Russia's war in Ukraine and the breakdown in the Russian military's normal chain of command.

Key Takeaways

- Russian strategic bombers likely targeted a Ukrainian field hospital in the Azovstal Steel Plant. The remaining Ukrainian defenders are likely running low on supplies.
- Russian attacks southwest of Izyum likely seek to outflank Ukrainian defenses on the direct road to Sloviansk and have made tactical gains in the last 24 hours.
- Russian forces continued tactical ground attacks and shelling along the entire line of contact in eastern Ukraine but did not secure any major advances.
- Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin stated that the DNR will postpone local Victory Day celebrations planned for May 9 until "the complete victory and the expansion of the DNR" to control Donetsk Oblast, though the Kremlin remains likely to attempt to claim some sort of victory on May 9.
- Russian forces conducted several locally successful attacks from Kherson toward Mykolaiv.
- Russian and proxy forces continued to mobilize in Transnistria and set conditions for a false flag attack.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 27

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, Kateryna Stepanenko, and George Barros
April 27, 8pm ET

Russian forces made minor but steady advances both from Izyum and in continued assaults along the line of contact in eastern Ukraine on April 27. Russian forces took several small towns directly west of Izyum in the past 24 hours. While this line of advance takes Russian forces away from their main objective of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, they likely intend to outflank Ukrainian defensive positions on the highways to Barvinkove and Slovyansk. Russian forces made several small advances in eastern Ukraine; Russia's increasing concentration of artillery assets is likely enabling these tactical advances. Russian forces are advancing methodically in several sectors but have achieved no notable breakthroughs. The capability of Russian forces to encircle large groups of Ukrainian forces remains in doubt.

The Kremlin continued to prepare for a likely false-flag missile attack against the Moldovan territory of Transnistria, which is illegally occupied by Russian forces. Russian proxies in Transnistria falsely claimed Ukrainian forces are preparing to attack Transnistria, and Ukrainian intelligence reported Russian forces are preparing to conduct a missile strike on Transnistria and blame Ukraine. Russian and Transnistrian forces also increased their readiness for possible operations in the last 24 hours. Russia may intend to involve Transnistria in the war in Ukraine to utilize Transnistria's (limited) reserve forces or to launch attacks and shell Ukraine from Transnistrian territory. The Kremlin may alternatively seek to destabilize Moldova itself to raise tensions in Moldova and neighboring Romania and put additional pressure on NATO, possibly seeking to reduce Western military support to Ukraine either by diverting NATO forces to Romania or threatening a wider escalation.

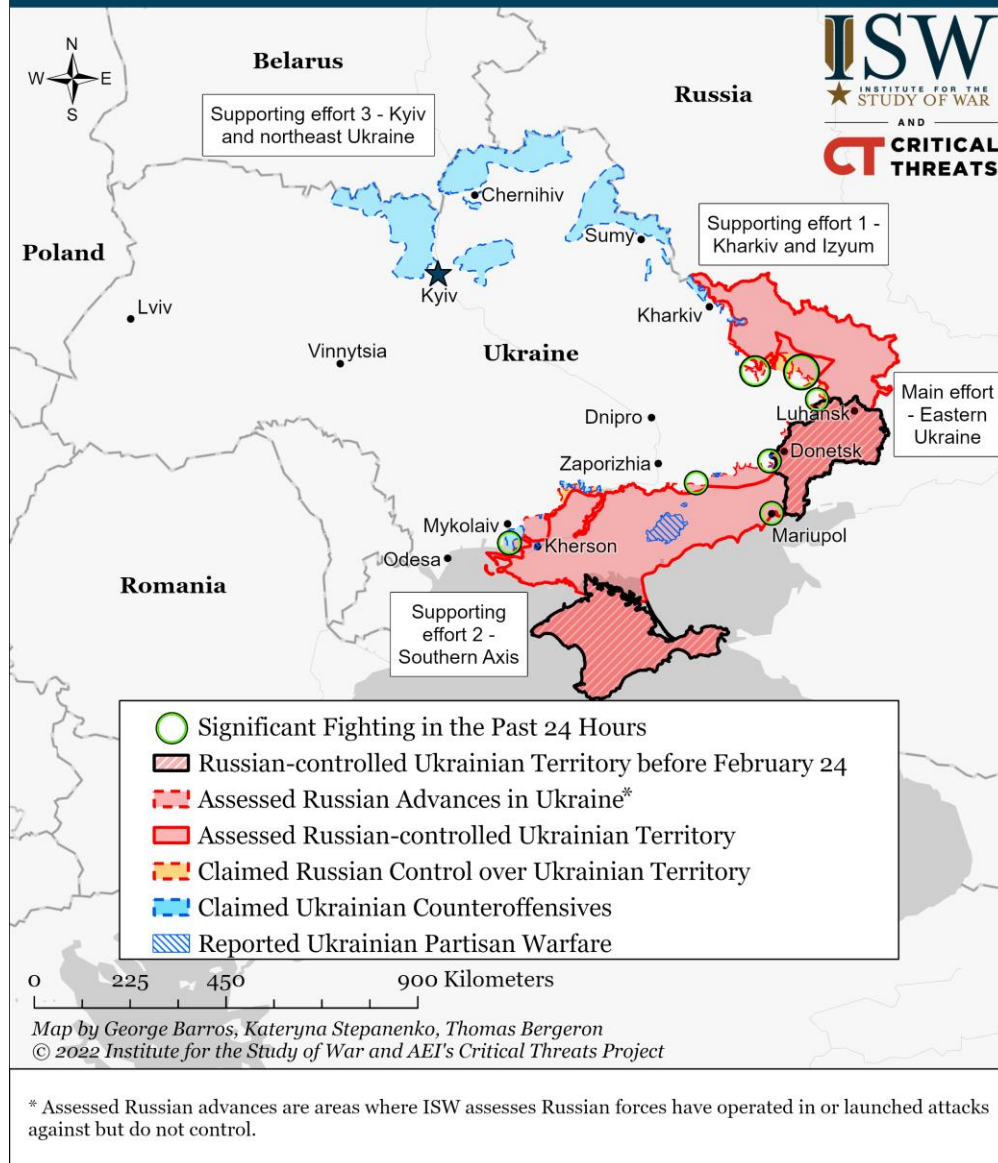
Russian forces are stepping up "filtration measures" in occupied territories and abducting Ukrainian citizens, likely for use in future prisoner exchanges. Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on April 27 that Russian forces are conducting large-scale "filtration measures" in Kharkiv, Zaporizhia, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Luhansk, and Donetsk Oblasts.[1] The "filtration" targets men of military age, former military and law enforcement personnel, and pro-Ukrainian activists for interrogation, torture, and possible execution. The GUR reported Russian forces are additionally shipping Ukrainian hostages to Crimea to "replenish the exchange fund," seeking to exchange Ukrainian civilians for Russian military prisoners in future prisoner swaps. The GUR additionally speculated that Russian forces may be preparing to use Ukrainian civilians to portray Prisoners of War in May 9th Victory Day celebrations, noting that Russian forces conducted similar propaganda efforts in Donetsk in 2014.

Ukrainian forces likely conducted drone or possibly missile strikes on Russian logistics centers in Belgorod and Voronezh on April 27. Russian sources and social media reported multiple explosions early on April 27, which Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mikhail Podolyak later euphemistically confirmed were Ukrainian strikes, stating Russian cities cannot "sit out" the invasion of Ukraine and "the disarmament of the Belgorod-Voronezh warehouses is a natural process." [2] Ukrainian forces will likely conduct further cross-border strikes to disrupt Russian logistics, which the Kremlin will likely falsely frame as an escalation or somehow a war crime.

Key Takeaways

- **Concentrated artillery is likely enabling limited Russian advances in eastern Ukraine, though Russian forces continue to struggle to break through prepared Ukrainian defenses.**
- **Russian forces funneled additional reinforcements and tactical missile units into the Izyum front and made minor advances. Russian forces are likely attempting to bypass Ukrainian forces on the road to Barvinkove by advancing directly west before pivoting southwards in the coming days.**
- **Heavy Russian bombardment and continued assaults failed to make headway against Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol's Azovstal plant, even as Russian forces reportedly prepared to stage a press tour in the occupied areas of the city on April 28.**
- **Russian forces around Kherson are likely preparing for a renewed push to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast in the coming days but Ukrainian counterattacks continue to disrupt Russian operations in the area.**
- **Russian occupation forces continued preparations to announce the creation of a Russian proxy "Kherson People's Republic" (KNR) amid widespread Ukrainian resistance.**
- **The Kremlin may be preparing to either bring Transnistria into the war in Ukraine or destabilize Moldova itself to put additional pressure on NATO.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 27, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 26

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird
April 26, 6:30 pm ET

Russian forces have adopted a sounder pattern of operational movement in eastern Ukraine, at least along the line from Izyum to Rubizhne. Russian troops are pushing down multiple roughly

parallel roads within supporting distance of one another, allowing them to bring more combat power to bear than their previous practice had supported. Russian troops on this line are making better progress than any other Russian advances in this phase of the war. They are pushing from Izyum southwest toward Barvinkove and southeast toward Slovyansk. They are also pushing several columns west and south of Rubizhne, likely intending to encircle it and complete its capture. The Russian advances even in this area are proceeding methodically rather than rapidly, however, and it is not clear how far they will be able to drive or whether they will be able to encircle Ukrainian forces in large numbers.

Russian forces on the Izyum axis likely benefit from the absence of prepared Ukrainian defensive positions against attacks from the Kharkiv direction toward Donbas. Ukraine has prepared to defend the line of contact with Russian-occupied Donbas since 2014, and Russian troops continue to struggle to penetrate those prepared defenses—as shown by repeated Russian efforts to take Avdiivka, just north of Donetsk City, or to advance through Popasna, just beyond the original line of contact.

Russian troops continued to attack Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol, including in the Azovstal Plant, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin’s claims that there is no more fighting in the city. Ukrainian forces likely still hold important positions beyond the plant itself, and Russian forces continue to fight outside the plant, bomb the plant, and assault positions near the plant. Putin’s order not to chase Ukrainian defenders into the tunnels and catacombs of the facility evidently did not preclude continued efforts to secure at least the entire perimeter of the plant and likely also the important M14 highway that runs along it to the north and northwest.

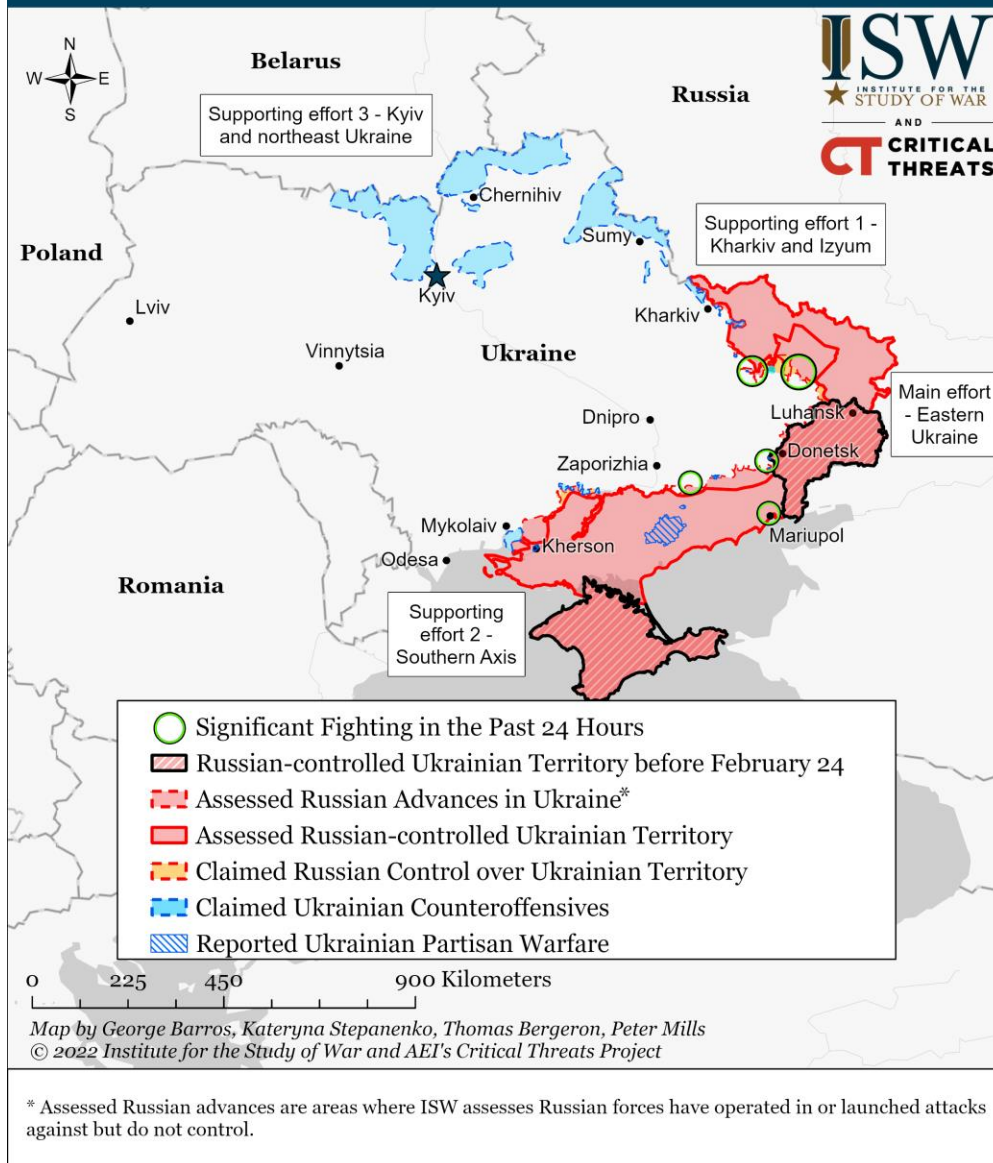
Russia is staging false-flag attacks in Transnistria, Moldova, likely setting conditions for further actions on that front. The two motorized rifle battalions Russia has illegally maintained in Transnistria since the end of the Cold War are not likely sufficient to mount a credible attack on Odesa by themselves, nor are the Russians likely to be able to reinforce them enough to allow them to do so. They could support more limited attacks to the northwest of Odesa, possibly causing panic and creating psychological effects to benefit Russian operations in the south of Ukraine.

Russia may also seek to destabilize Moldova itself, however. Comments by the head of the Donetsk People’s Republic and other Russian officials and proxies raise the possibility that Putin might recognize the self-styled Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR) in Transnistria as he recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics. The PMR could then ask for additional Russian protection, and Putin could attempt to send some additional forces or capabilities to Transnistria. Any such activities would greatly raise tensions and fears in Moldova and neighboring Romania, putting additional pressure on NATO, possibly giving Putin a cheap “win,” and distracting from Russia’s slog in eastern Ukraine. Continued indications that Russian forces intend to hold referenda to establish “people’s republics” in occupied areas of southern Ukraine raise the possibility that Putin intends to unveil an array of new “independent” “people’s republics” as part of a Victory Day celebration. The forecast cone is wide, and there is as yet no solid basis to assess one path as much more likely than another. But the false-flag attacks and Russian and Russian proxy reactions to them are alarming, and it behooves NATO and the West to consider the most dangerous courses of action and prepare to meet them.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continue to make slow but steady progress south from Izyum and northwest of Rubizhne, but Russian offensive operations elsewhere along the line in eastern Ukraine remain unsuccessful.**
- **Fighting continues in Mariupol, where Ukrainian defenders apparently still hold positions beyond the Azovstal Plant.**
- **Russia and/or Russian proxies have staged false-flag attacks in Russian-occupied Transnistria, possibly to threaten a (very likely unsuccessful) attack on Odesa, possibly to destabilize Moldova.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 25

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird
April 25, 5:00 pm ET

Russian forces conducted precision missile strikes against five Ukrainian railway stations in central and western Ukraine on April 25 in a likely effort to disrupt Ukrainian reinforcements to eastern Ukraine and Western aid shipments. A series of likely coordinated Russian missile strikes conducted within an hour of one another early on April 25 hit critical transportation infrastructure in

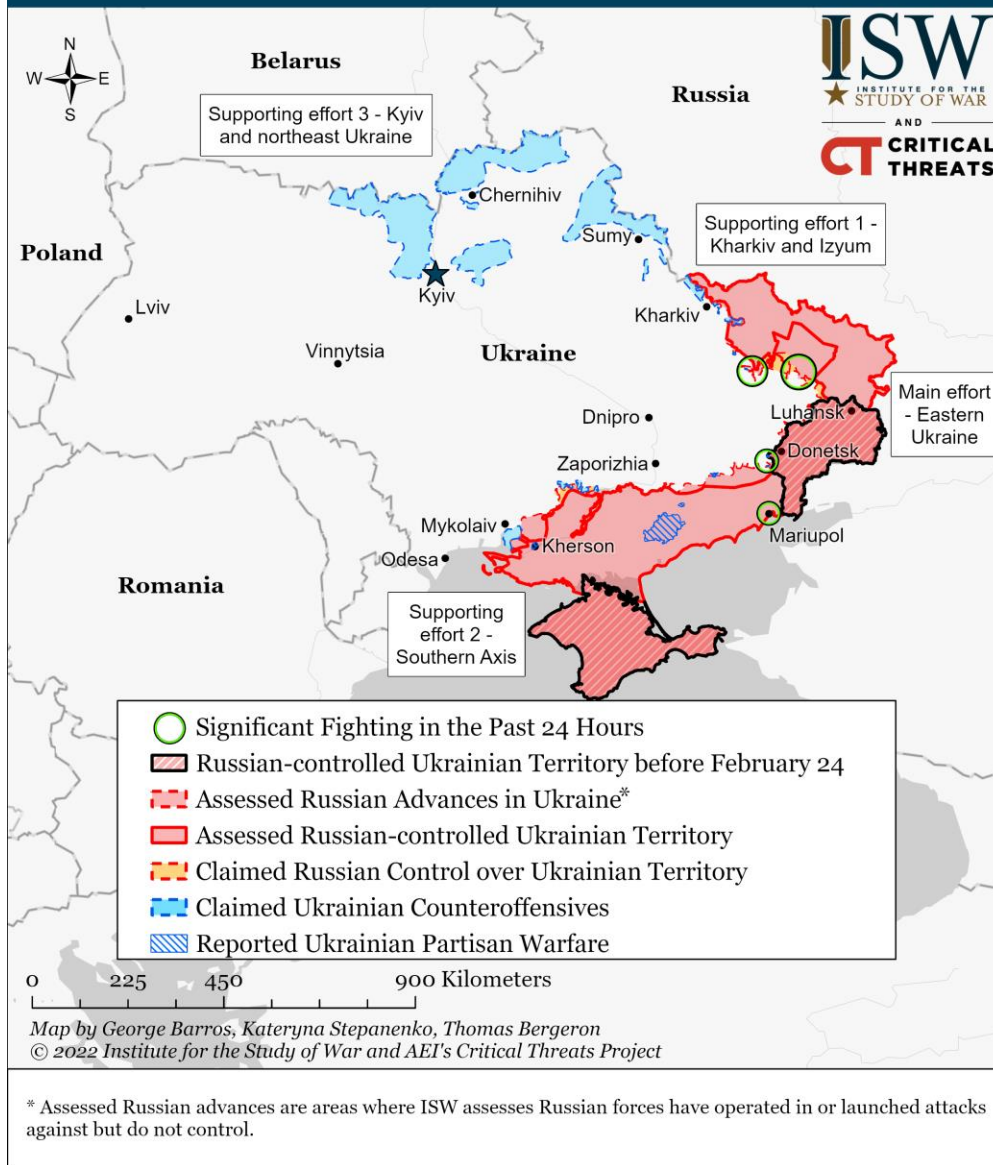
Vinnytsia, Poltava, Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, and Zhytomyr oblasts.[1] Russian forces seek to disrupt Ukrainian reinforcements and logistics. The Kremlin may have additionally conducted this series of strikes—an abnormal number of precision missile strikes for one day—to demonstrate Russia’s ability to hit targets in Western Ukraine and to disrupt western aid shipments after US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s surprise visit to Kyiv over the weekend. However, Russian precision strike capabilities will remain limited and unlikely to decisively affect the course of the war; open-source research organization Bellingcat reported on April 24 that Russia has likely used 70% of its total stockpile of precision missiles to date.[2]

Local Ukrainian counterattacks retook territory north of Kherson and west of Izyum in the past 24 hours. Russian forces continue to make little progress in scattered, small-scale attacks in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian forces are successfully halting Russian efforts to bypass Ukrainian defensive positions around Izyum, and Russian forces are struggling to complete even tactical encirclements. Local Ukrainian counterattacks in Kherson Oblast are unlikely to develop into a larger counteroffensive in the near term but are disrupting Russian efforts to completely capture Kherson Oblast and are likely acting as a drain on Russian combat power that could otherwise support Russia’s main effort in eastern Ukraine.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces resumed ground attacks against Mariupol’s Azovstal Steel Plant in the last 24 hours. Russian officers may assess they will be unable to starve out the remaining defenders by May 9 (a possible self-imposed deadline to complete the capture of Mariupol). Russian forces will likely take high casualties if they resume major ground assaults to clear the facility.**
- **Russian forces are accelerating efforts to secure occupied Mariupol but will likely face widespread Ukrainian resistance.**
- **Continued Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine took little to no additional territory in the past 24 hours.**
- **Prudent tactical Ukrainian counterattacks around Izyum are likely impeding Russian efforts to complete even tactical encirclements of Ukrainian forces.**
- **Russian forces are preparing for renewed attacks to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast in southern Ukraine after minor losses in the past 48 hours.**
- **Russian forces likely conducted a false flag attack in Transnistria (Russia’s illegally occupied territory in Moldova) to amplify Russian claims of anti-Russian sentiment in Moldova, but Transnistrian forces remain unlikely to enter the war in Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 25, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 24

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark and Kateryna Stepanenko

April 24, 3:00 pm ET

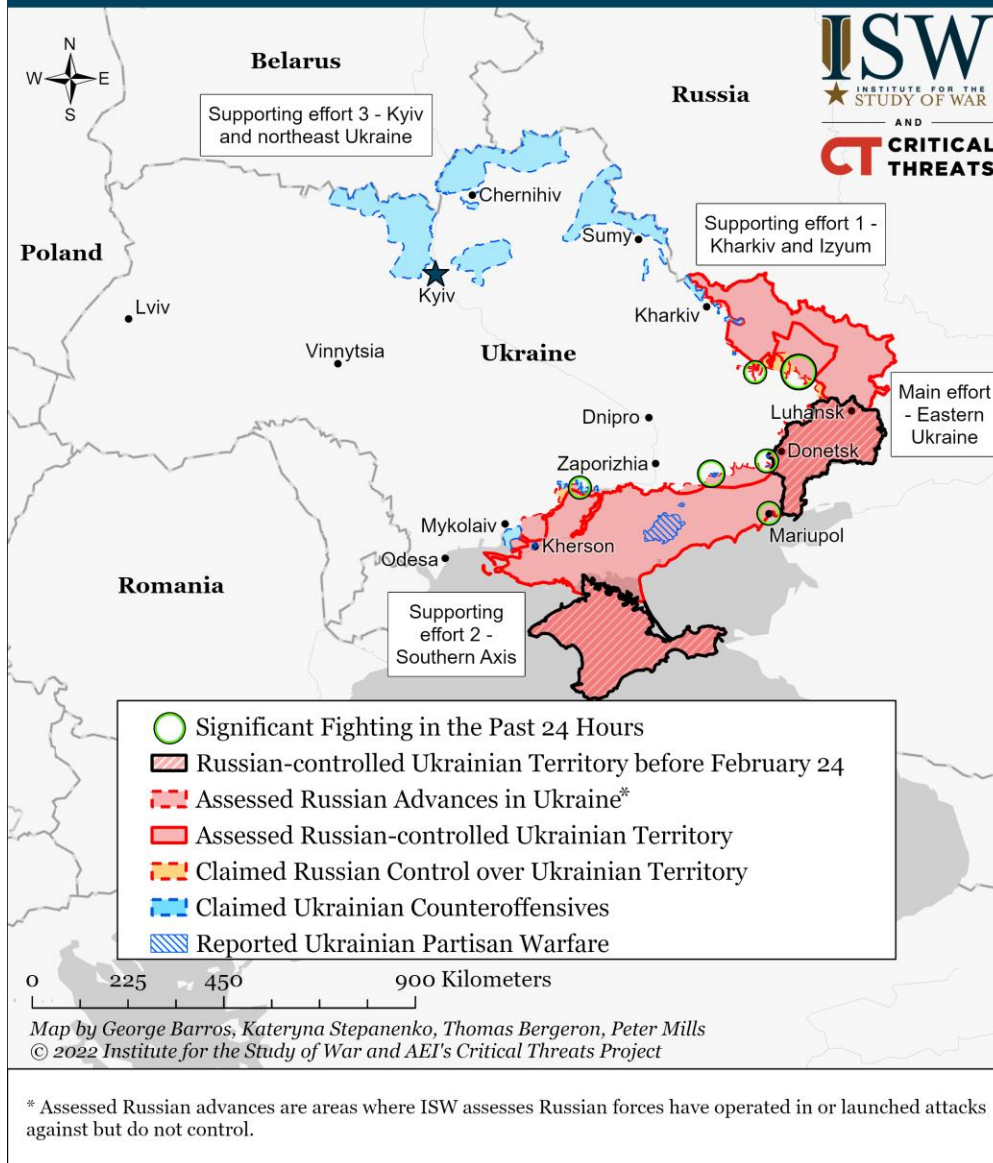
Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine made minor advances around Severodonetsk on April 24, seizing several small towns and establishing a pontoon bridge across the Krasna River west of Severodonetsk. Russia's offensive in eastern Ukraine continues to follow the pattern of their operations throughout the war, using small units to conduct dispersed attacks along multiple axes rather than taking the pauses necessary to prepare for decisive operations. Russian forces continued to bombard the remaining Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol's Azovstal Steel Plant and may be preparing for renewed assaults on the facility, which would likely lead to high Russian casualties. The military situation in southern Ukraine did not change in the last 24 hours.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to pressure Ukrainian defenders in the Azovstal facility in Mariupol.**
- **Ukrainian sources report that Russian troops are preparing to conduct renewed assaults on Azovstal that would likely prove costly—possibly to meet a Kremlin-imposed deadline to clear Mariupol—but ISW cannot independently confirm these reports.**
- **Russian forces secured limited gains northwest of Severodonetsk but remain unlikely to be able to launch massed offensive operations.**
- **Additional Russian forces are deploying to reinforce unsuccessful attacks on the Izyum front.**
- **Ukrainian civilians in occupied Kharkiv Oblast are reportedly organizing volunteer movements to resist Russian occupation measures, similar to previously documented actions in southern Ukraine.**

CORRECTION: ISW mistakenly reported on April 23 that Russian troops seized Lozova, Kharkiv Oblast, approximately 100km west of Izyum. Russian troops actually seized Lozove, Donetsk Oblast, approximately 35km east of Izyum. We apologize for the error.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 23

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird
April 23, 6:30 pm ET

Russian forces continued offensive operations along multiple axes even as they completed moving reinforcements drawn from the retreat from Kyiv into the east and continued redeploying some forces from Mariupol to the north. The Russians have not taken time to refit troops moving from Kyiv or Mariupol before recommitting them to combat operations. They are not pausing offensive operations to wait until they have concentrated overwhelming combat power, and they do not appear to be massing forces on a few decisive axes of advance. They are continuing the pattern of operations they have followed throughout the war: committing small collections of units to widely dispersed attacks along multiple axes and refusing to accept necessary operational pauses to set conditions for decisive operations.

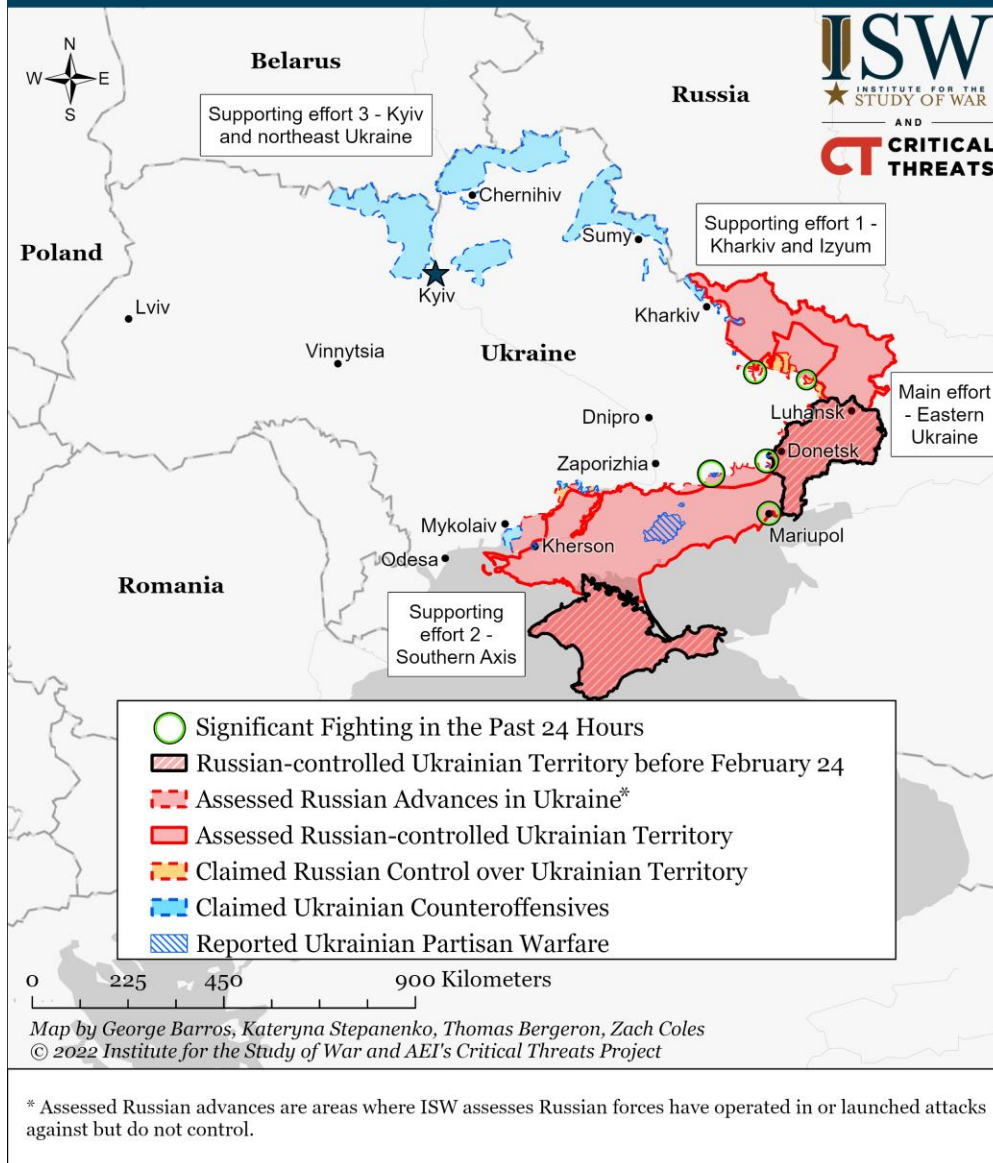
Russian forces have thus far only committed a handful of battalion tactical groups (BTGs) to offensive operations in their various sectors, however, and could still launch a massed offensive operation. We assess that such an operation is unlikely given observed patterns and the inherent limitations of available actual combat power in troops that have fought hard and suffered many casualties, as well as observed challenges with command-and-control at the regiment/brigade and division level. It is possible that the Russians are addressing or attempting to address some of those challenges and will soon launch an offensive in a new and better-coordinated form, but it remains unlikely.

The objectives of Russian offensives around the Izyum-Donetsk City salient are unclear. Russian forces may seek to reach the Izyum-Debaltseve road along two or more axes to encircle a large concentration of Ukrainian forces and built-up areas. Ukrainian officials suggested on April 23 that Russian forces near Rubizhne and Popasna may seek to encircle the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area rather than pursue the deeper envelopment.^[1] It is too soon to evaluate the likelihood of this Russian course of action or the probability of its success.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued their pressure on the Azovstal facility in Mariupol.**
- **Russian troops drawn from the retreat from Kyiv are re-entering combat in eastern Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces from around Mariupol are redeploying to the vicinity of Donetsk City and are likely to enter combat again soon and without rest or refit.**
- **Russia continued conducting small-scale ground offensives at multiple points along the front from Izyum to Zaporizhia Oblast.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 22

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird

April 22, 5:30pm ET

A briefing by the Russian Deputy Commander of the Central Military District on April 22 reiterated standing Russian objectives in eastern and southern Ukraine and did not announce any new operations. Deputy Commander of the Central Military District Rustam Minnekaev gave a speech to the

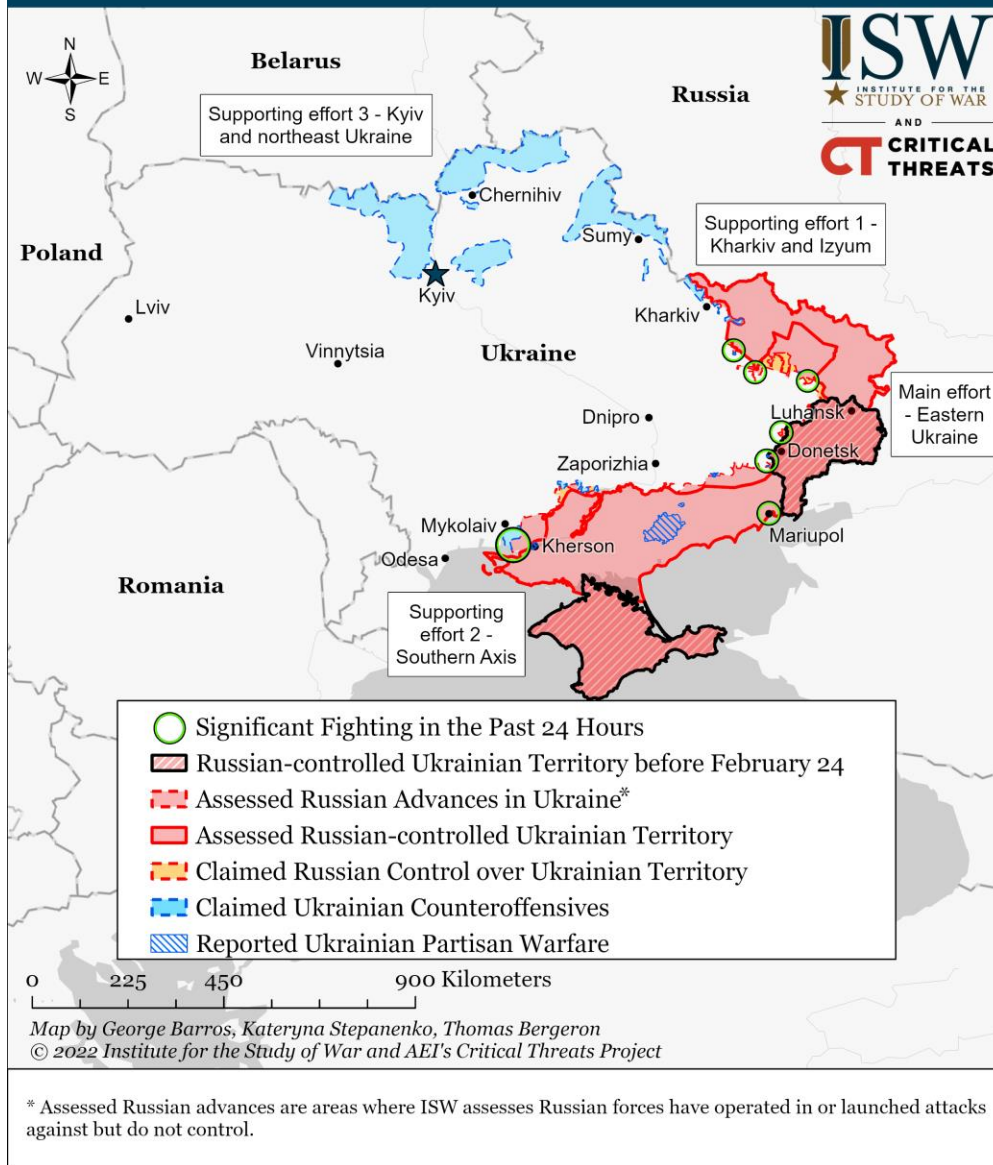
annual meeting of the Union of Defense Industries on April 22 that has been misinterpreted as the announcement of a new Russian campaign.[1] Minnekaev said Russian forces began a new phase of the war two days ago, an unsurprising confirmation of the new phase of the Russian offensive announced by both Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Ukrainian officials on April 19.[2] He stated the primary objective of Russian forces is to capture the entirety of the Donbas region and southern Ukraine to provide a land bridge to Crimea; as ISW has previously assessed, Russian forces seek to capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and retain control of the Kherson region.

Minnekaev stated that Russian control of southern Ukraine provides Russia a *future* capability to conduct an offensive toward Transnistria, rather than announcing an imminent Russian offensive toward Moldova. Minnekaev said Russian control of southern Ukraine will provide “another way out to Transnistria,” the illegally Russian-occupied strip of territory in Moldova, where he falsely claimed “there are also facts of oppression of the Russian-speaking population.” We do not read this as a statement of intent to conduct a major offensive operation toward Moldova. An offensive toward Moldova would likely have been phrased around securing a “land corridor” [сухопутный коридор] to Moldova, much like the Russian land corridor to Crimea. Even if Russian forces did seek to resume major offensive operations toward Mykolaiv and on to Odesa, they are highly unlikely to have the capability to do so.

Key Takeaways

- **A briefing by the Deputy Commander of the Central Military District restated the standing Russian objectives in the current phase of the war: capturing the entirety of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and defending Russian positions in southern Ukraine against Ukrainian counterattacks.**
- **Ongoing purges of Russian general officers for failures in Ukraine will likely further degrade Russian command and control.**
- **Russian forces seek to starve out the remaining defenders and civilians in Mariupol’s Azovstal Steel Plant and are unlikely to allow trapped civilians to leave.**
- **Russian forces conducted localized attacks and reconnoitered Ukrainian positions south of Izyum and did not make any advances.**
- **Russian forces secured minor gains in continuing daily attacks on the line of contact in eastern Ukraine.**
- **The Kremlin is setting conditions to create proxy republics in Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts to cement Russian control over these regions and conscript Ukrainian manpower.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 22, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Ukraine Invasion Update 24
[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

with the Critical Threats Project, AEI

April 22, 2022

The Ukraine Invasion Update is a weekly synthetic product covering key political and rhetorical events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. This update covers events from April 15-21. All of the ISW Russia's team's coverage of the war in Ukraine—including daily military assessments and maps, past Conflict Updates, and several supplemental assessments—are available on our [Ukraine Crisis Coverage](#) landing page.

Key Takeaways April 15-21

- **Russia and Ukraine are unlikely to resume negotiations in the coming weeks. Both sides await the outcome of Russia's ongoing offensive in eastern Ukraine. Kyiv likely assesses that its military has the potential to push Russian forces back to their pre-February 24 positions and is unlikely to engage in negotiations until that outcome occurs or becomes significantly less likely.**
- **The Kremlin is increasingly describing the war in Ukraine as a war with NATO to the domestic Russian audience to explain slower-than-intended operations and mounting casualties.**
- **The Kremlin likely intends to create one or more proxy states in occupied southern Ukraine to cement its military occupation and set conditions to demand permanent control over these regions.**
- **Russian and Belarusian officials seek to frame Western sanctions as predominantly harming European economies while playing up the efficacy of their sanction-mitigation efforts.**
- **The Kremlin is failing to deter NATO expansion and failing to disrupt Ukraine's military alignment with the West.**
- **The Kremlin remains unlikely to use a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine in this phase of the war.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 21

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

April 21, 6:45pm ET

The Kremlin declared victory in the battle of Mariupol. Russian forces will attempt to starve out remaining Ukrainian defenders in the Azovstal Steel Plant rather than clear it through likely costly assaults. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu declared victory in the battle of Mariupol on April 21 despite the continued presence of Ukrainian forces in Mariupol's Azovstal Steel Plant. In a staged, televised meeting, Putin ordered Shoigu to halt assaults on the plant to limit Russian casualties, claiming Russian forces have already captured the entirety of the city. The Kremlin will spin the (still incomplete) capture of Mariupol into a major victory in Ukraine to compensate for stalled or failed Russian offensives elsewhere.

The Kremlin's reduction of the pace of operations in Mariupol is unlikely to enable the deployment of significant combat power to support other offensive operations in the coming days and weeks. Statements from US officials that Russia has not yet removed a dozen battalion tactical groups (BTGs) from Mariupol despite Putin's claimed victory do not capture either the status of these Russian forces or other constraints on their use.^[1] ISW has consistently assessed that Russian BTGs have taken high casualties in the battle of Mariupol, are degraded, and are unlikely to possess their full complement of personnel (800-900 at full strength). As with Russian operations elsewhere in Ukraine, reporting on numbers of BTGs without additional context and analysis of the *combat power* of these units is not a useful evaluation of Russian forces. While it is unlikely that all 12 reported BTGs were involved in the final fighting around the Azovstal plant, it will still take some time for those units that *were* engaged in final assaults to disengage for redeployment elsewhere. Some portion of these Russian forces will be necessary for several other missions—including maintaining the siege of the Azovstal plant, securing the rest of Mariupol against any remaining pockets of Ukrainian forces and likely partisan actions, and possibly redeploying to support Russian forces maintaining control of southern Ukraine. **Russian forces will certainly be able to redeploy some units from Mariupol to offensive operations elsewhere—but Ukrainian forces have succeeded in tying down and degrading a substantial Russian force,**

and the Kremlin's declaration of victory has not inherently freed up 12 BTGs worth of combat power for other operations.

Key Takeaways

- The Kremlin's declaration of victory in Mariupol is unlikely to enable the deployment of significant combat power to reinforce offensive operations in eastern Ukraine in the coming days or weeks.
- Russian forces involved in the battle of Mariupol are likely heavily damaged and Ukrainian forces succeeded in tying down and degrading a substantial Russian force.
- Russian forces continued offensive operations in eastern Ukraine but made only marginal gains.
- Ukrainian forces continued to halt Russian attacks around Izyum.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 21, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 20

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Karolina Hird
April 20, 6pm ET

Russian forces made minor advances in the ongoing offensive in eastern Ukraine on April 19, seizing several small towns and advancing into the key frontline towns of Rubizhne and Popasna. Russian forces continued major assaults with heavy air and artillery support but are continuing to build the logistics and command-and-control capabilities necessary for a larger offensive. Russian forces have not achieved any major breakthroughs, nor have they demonstrated any new capability to conduct multiple successful, simultaneous advances. Russian forces additionally made grinding progress against remaining Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol's Azovstal Steel Works and announced plans for a May 9 Victory Day parade in the city – indicating Russian forces will declare victory in Mariupol by that date at the latest.

Key Takeaways

Russia's offensive in eastern Ukraine secured minor gains in the last 24 hours, taking parts of the key frontline towns of Rubizhne and Popasna.

- **Ukrainian forces reported the presence of small numbers of Syrian or Libyan mercenaries fighting in Popasna (eastern Ukraine), likely individual recruits fighting under the umbrella of the Wagner Group rather than larger units.**
- **Russian forces made incremental advances in Mariupol and continued to set conditions to declare victory in the city by –at the latest – May 9.**
- **Russian forces made minor advances around Izyum but have not secured any major breakthroughs.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 20, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 19

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird

April 19, 5:30 pm ET

Russian and Ukrainian officials announced that the next phase of the Russian invasion of Ukraine began on April 19. Russian forces conducted intensive artillery and air bombardments of many areas along the front line from around Izyum to Mykolaiv but relatively few ground offensive operations. Russian forces continue to receive personnel and equipment reinforcements as well as command-and-control and logistics capabilities even as they conduct air and artillery preparations and some mechanized advances.

The Russians have not fully set conditions for a large-scale offensive operation. The Russians have not had enough time to reconstitute forces withdrawn from the Battle of Kyiv and ready them properly for a new offensive in the east. The Russians appear to be still building logistics and command-and-control capabilities even as they start the next round of major fighting. The tempo of Russian operations continues to suggest that President Vladimir Putin is demanding a hasty offensive to achieve his stated objectives, possibly by “Victory Day” on May 9. The haste and partial preparation of the Russian attack will likely undermine its effectiveness and may compromise its success.

Russian forces appear to be attempting to conduct a wide encirclement of Ukrainian troops along axes from Izyum to the southeast and from Donetsk City to the north even as they push west from Popasna and positions north of Severodonetsk. Russian ground offensives in the last 24 hours occurred around Izyum, Kreminna (north of Severodonetsk), and from Donetsk City toward Avdiivka. Only the advance to and possibly through Kreminna made significant progress. An encirclement on this scale would likely take considerable time to complete against Ukrainian resistance. Even if the Russians did complete such an encirclement and trapped a large concentration of Ukrainian forces inside one or more pockets, the Ukrainian defenders would likely be able to hold out for a considerable period and might well be able to break out.

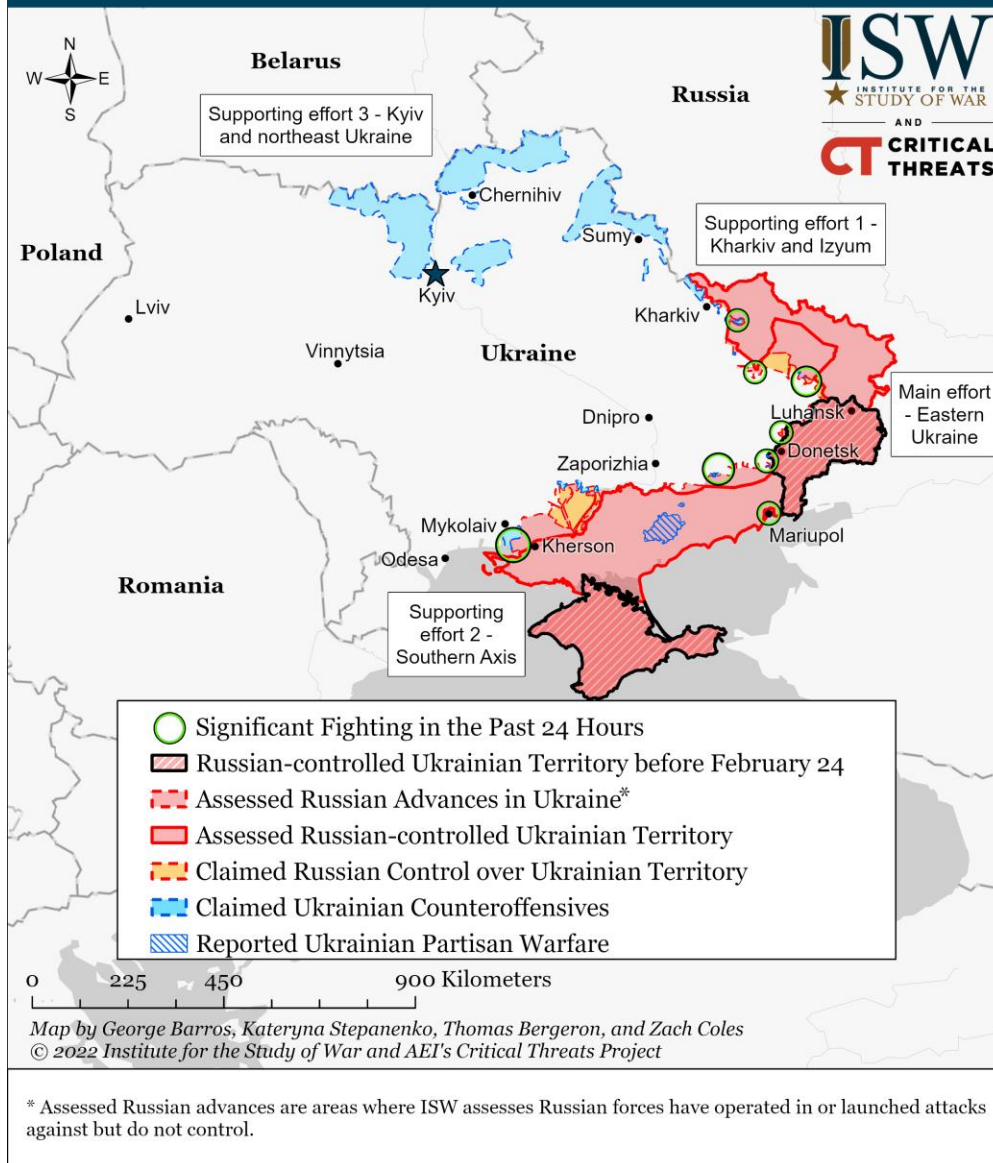
The Russians may alternatively try to complete several smaller encirclements simultaneously, each trapping fewer Ukrainian forces and therefore taking less time to complete and then reduce. Coordinating such operations is complicated and beyond the planning and execution capacities the Russian army has demonstrated in the conflict thus far.

Ukrainian forces continue to defend parts of the Azovstal complex in Mariupol, but Russian officials and media are gathering in and near the city, likely in preparation to declare victory in the coming days whether or not fighting continues.

Key Takeaways

- The next phase of the Russian offensive in Ukraine’s east has reportedly begun, largely with artillery and air bombardments supporting a few small-scale ground offensives.
- Russian officials and media are likely preparing to declare victory in Mariupol in the coming days, possibly before Ukrainian forces in the Azovstal facility have been fully defeated.
- The Russians may be attempting a single wide encirclement of Ukrainian forces from Izyum to Donetsk City or a series of smaller encirclements within that arc. It is too soon to assess the intended Russian scheme of maneuver.
- Russian operations continue to proceed hastily, as if President Vladimir Putin has set an arbitrary date by which they must succeed. Putin may have decided that he will announce a Russian success and the completion of the operation on Victory Day, May 9. The haste with which Russian forces are moving may compromise the success of their operations.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 19, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 18

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird

April 18, 6:30pm ET

Russian forces began a new phase of large-scale offensive operations in eastern Ukraine on April 18 likely intended to capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Russian forces have been concentrating reinforcements—including both newly-deployed units and damaged units withdrawn

from northeastern Ukraine—to the Donbas axis for several weeks. Russian forces conducted large-scale assaults focused on Rubizhne, Popasna, and Marinka with heavy artillery support on April 18 after previously conducting only localized attacks and shelling along the line of contact. Russian forces have not secured any major territorial gains as of publication.

The Russian offensive in the east is unlikely to be dramatically more successful than previous Russian offensives, but Russian forces may be able to wear down Ukrainian defenders or achieve limited gains. Russian forces did not take the operational pause that was likely necessary to reconstitute and properly integrate damaged units withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine into operations in eastern Ukraine. As we have assessed previously, Russian forces withdrawn from around Kyiv and going back to fight in Donbas have, at best, been patched up and filled out with soldiers from other damaged units, and the Russian military has few, if any, cohesive units not previously deployed to Ukraine to funnel into new operations.[1] Frequent reports of disastrously low Russian morale and continuing logistics challenges indicate the effective combat power of Russian units in eastern Ukraine is a fraction of their on-paper strength in numbers of battalion tactical groups (BTGs). Russian forces may certainly be able to wear down Ukrainian positions in eastern Ukraine through the heavy concentration of firepower and sheer weight of numbers, but likely at a high cost. A sudden and dramatic Russian offensive success remains highly unlikely, however, and Ukrainian tactical losses would not spell the end of the campaign in eastern Ukraine, much less the war as a whole.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces likely began large-scale offensive operations in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts focused on Rubizhne, Popasna, and Marinka.**
- **Russian forces may be able to gain ground through the heavy concentration of artillery and numbers. However, Russian operations are unlikely to be dramatically more successful than previous major offensives around Kyiv. The Russian military is unlikely to have addressed the root causes—poor coordination, the inability to conduct cross-country operations, and low morale—that impeded prior offensives.**
- **Successful Ukrainian counterattacks southeast of Kharkiv will likely force Russian forces to divert some units intended for the Izyum offensive, but Ukrainian forces are unlikely to completely sever Russian lines of communication north of Izyum in the coming days.**
- **Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol continued to hold out against heavy Russian artillery and air bombardment.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 18, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 17

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark and George Barros

April 17, 3pm ET

Russian forces likely captured the Port of Mariupol on April 16 despite Ukrainian General Staff denials, reducing organized Ukrainian resistance in the city to the Azovstal factory in eastern Mariupol. Russian and DNR forces released footage on April 16 confirming their presence in several key locations in southwestern Mariupol, including the port itself. Isolated groups of Ukrainian troops may remain active in Mariupol outside of the Azovstal factory, but they will likely be cleared out by Russian

forces in the coming days. Russian forces likely seek to force the remaining defenders of the Azovstal factory to capitulate through overwhelming firepower to avoid costly clearing operations, but remaining Ukrainian defenders appear intent on staging a final stand. Russian forces will likely complete the capture of Mariupol in the coming week, but final assaults will likely continue to cost them dearly.

Russian forces continued to amass on the Izyum axis and in eastern Ukraine, increasingly including low-quality proxy conscripts, in parallel with continuous – and unsuccessful – small-scale attacks. Russian forces did not take any territory on the Izyum axis or in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in the past 24 hours. Russian forces deploying to eastern Ukraine reportedly continue to face significant morale and supply issues and appear unlikely to intend, or be able to, conduct a major offensive surge in the coming days. Deputy Ukrainian Minister of Defense Anna Malyar stated on April 17 that the Russian military is in no hurry to launch an offensive in eastern Ukraine, having learned from their experience from Kyiv – but Russian forces continue localized attacks and are likely unable to amass the cohesive combat power necessary for a major breakthrough.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces likely captured the Port of Mariupol on April 16 despite Ukrainian General Staff denials.**
- **Russian forces likely seek to force the remaining defenders of the Azovstal factory to capitulate through overwhelming firepower to avoid costly clearing operations, but remaining Ukrainian defenders appear intent on staging a final stand.**
- **Evgeny Prigozhin, financier of the Wagner Group, is likely active on the ground in eastern Ukraine to coordinate Wagner Group recruitment and funding.**
- **Russian forces continued their build up around Izyum but did not conduct any offensive operations.**

The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on April 16 that the Kremlin is increasingly arresting Russian and proxy officers for failures in Ukraine. The GUR reported Russian military authorities established a commission intended to run from March 2 to April 24 in occupied Horlivka to identify the reasons for personnel shortages among Russian forces. The GUR reported that Russian investigators discovered the commanders of Russia's 3rd Motor Rifle Brigade was 100% staffed at the beginning of the invasion when it in fact only had 55% of its personnel and arrested two battalion commanders in the brigade. The GUR also reported the FSB arrested DNR Defense Spokesperson Eduard Basurin for his "careless statement" on April 11 revealing Russian intent to use chemical weapons in Mariupol, though there is still no independent confirmation of the Ukrainian claim of Russian chemical weapons use.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 17, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 16

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird
April 16, 5:00 pm ET

Ukraine's sinking of the *Moskva* was a significant event that has likely triggered intensified Russian air and missile attacks in retaliation, but the decisive operations of this phase of the war will still be conducted on the ground in eastern Ukraine. The commitment of the Black Sea Fleet's naval infantry to the fight around Mariupol some weeks ago meant that Russian naval operations would play a supporting role in the conflict. Increased Russian air and missile attacks are also unlikely to have a decisive impact on the outcome of the war, since there is no reason to assess that Russia has been holding enough air and missile capability in reserve to tip the balance if it is now committed. This report, and likely future reports as well, will thus remain focused on the ground operations, especially those in eastern Ukraine.

Russian forces continued to amass troops around Izyum in preparation for continuing offensive operations in eastern Ukraine. The Russians continued small-scale attacks in the vicinities of Izyum, Popasna, and the area around Rubizhne and Severodonetsk—sometimes with artillery, sometimes with mechanized forces. These attacks have not made significant gains so far. It is unclear if they are part of a rolling offensive operation into which Russian reinforcements will be fed as they become available or if they are setting conditions for a larger-scale, better-coordinated offensive that will start soon.

The specific terrain on which battles in eastern Ukraine will be fought may constrain the Russians' ability to take advantage of the number of forces they are amassing for the attack. Eastern Ukraine is famous for being superb terrain for large-scale mechanized maneuver because of the World War II campaigns of the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. It is far from clear, however, that Russian forces will find it much more conducive to rapid decisive mechanized operations than other parts of the theater. The Russians have struggled repeatedly to seize built-up areas rapidly or even to reduce them once encircled. They will have to seize several significant population centers to achieve their apparent objectives in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, however, including Severodonetsk, Rubizhne, Lysychansk, Slovyansk, and Kramatorsk, as well as several smaller towns. The difficulties they have encountered taking Rubizhne do not bode well for their rapid success against other built-up areas. The ground itself is also challenging as it is crisscrossed by many small water features and, at the moment, still very muddy. The reinforcements the Russians are bringing into this part of the theater will help, of course, but large numbers of much fresher Russian troops struggled to take relatively small population centers north, west, and northeast of Kyiv even before getting into the Kyiv suburbs proper. The Russians must take the major population centers in Donetsk and Luhansk, however, if they are to achieve the operation's stated goals.

Russian forces will likely continue operating along three primary axes of advance in Donbas: from Izyum south via Slovyansk toward Russian-controlled Donetsk Oblast near Debaltseve; from Rubizhne and Severodonetsk southwest toward the Izyum-Debaltseve highway; and from Popasna west toward that highway. They may open an additional axis of advance from near Donetsk City to the north toward Kramatorsk as well, according to the Ukrainian General Staff.^[1] The Russian main effort currently appears to be from Izyum southeast along the highway to Slovyansk. The drive west from Popasna is presumably meant to reach the Izyum-Debaltseve highway, possibly setting conditions to encircle or drive off Ukrainian forces defending against a Russian advance from the Debaltseve area to the northwest. The purpose of the direct assaults on Severodonetsk and Rubizhne is less clear. The Russians may be trying to seize those cities as part of the objective to seize Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, rather than waiting until they have been encircled and trying to reduce them at that point. They may alternatively be seeking to fix Ukrainian forces in that northeastern sector of the salient the Russians intend to encircle. The general pattern of operations and apparent movements of Russian reinforcements suggest that the drive from Izyum to the southwest will be the main effort in this part of the theater but that the Russians will continue to attack on multiple axes that are not immediately mutually supporting.

Ukrainian officials report that Russia has concentrated as many as 22 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) in the vicinity of Izyum, but the Russians will struggle to take advantage of that force concentration if they cannot open up parallel axes of advance—something they have notably struggled to do in other parts of the theater. Russian forces are apparently attempting to drive southwest from Izyum toward Barvinkove, which could allow them to open up an axis of advance in addition to the main Izyum-Slovyansk highway. But Barvinkove is a large enough settlement to delay the Russian advance if Ukrainian forces hold it, and the route from Izyum to Barvinkove is not really parallel to the Izyum-Slovyansk highway—Barvinkove is roughly 50 kilometers west of Slovyansk. Taking Barvinkove does not cut the only Ukrainian ground line of communication (GLOC) to Slovyansk,

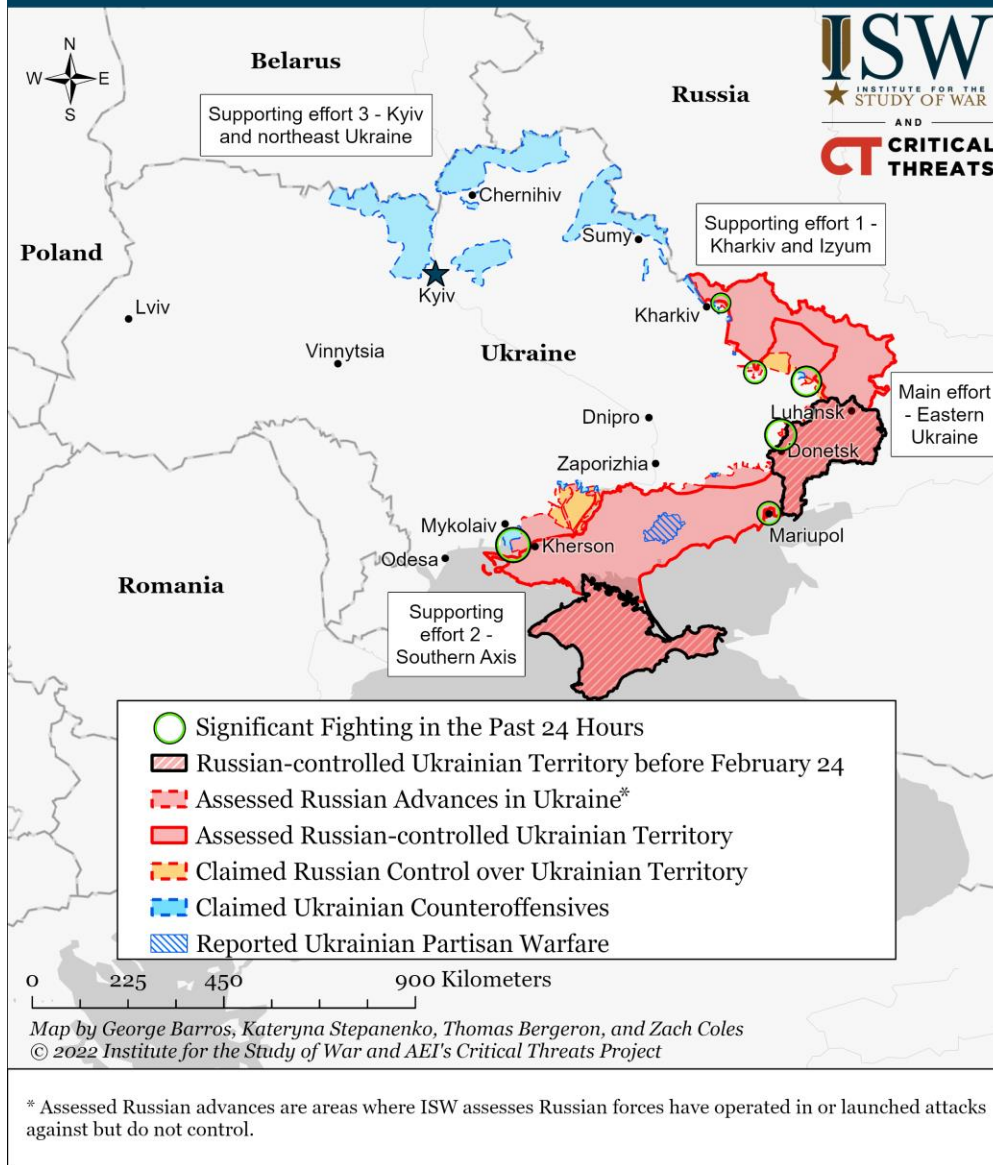
moreover, as another main GLOC to Slovyansk from the west runs through Kramatorsk, about 45 kilometers southeast of Barvinkove.

The individual Russian offensives in the east are thus unlikely to proceed dramatically more successfully than similar operations around Kyiv unless the Russians change their operational patterns significantly. The Russians could overwhelm the Ukrainian defenders by the sheer number of different axes of advance forcing the Ukrainians to spread themselves too thinly. But the Ukrainians' demonstrated will and ability to hold much larger Russian forces at bay in built-up areas for a considerable time suggests that many if not most or even all of these Russian drives will stall. This discussion does not take account of the quality and physical and psychological state of the Russian forces, which we have considered in detail in previous reports, and which makes a sudden dramatic Russian offensive success even less likely.

Key Takeaways

- **The Russians and their proxies appear to be preparing to declare victory in the Battle of Mariupol, as Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) head Denis Pushilin opened a United Russia party office in the city.**
- **Russian reinforcements drawn from troops that had fought around Kyiv have appeared in eastern Ukraine. Those reinforcements have not received sufficient time to recover physically or mentally from their losses and defeat around Kyiv and are unlikely to generate combat power proportionate to their numbers.**
- **Ukrainian officials claim that the Russians canceled the deployment to Syria of one of the last combat units that had not previously seen combat in Ukraine and sent that unit toward Donbas.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 16, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 15

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark and Kateryna Stepanenko

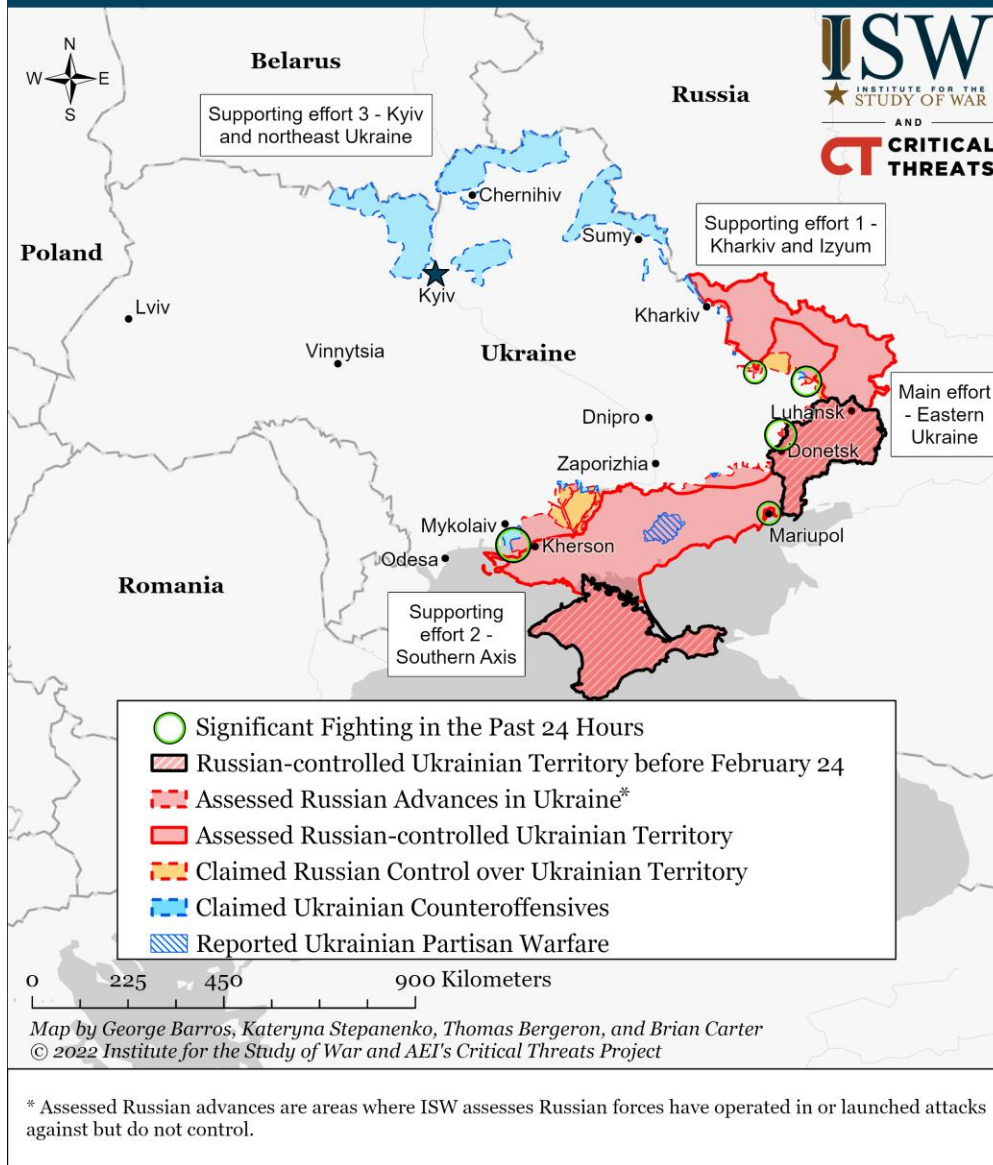
April 15, 4:30pm ET

Russian forces continued small-scale, tactical attacks on the Izyum and Severodonetsk axes; additional reinforcements to date have not enabled any breakthroughs of Ukrainian defenses. Russian forces continue to deploy reinforcements to eastern Ukraine but show no indication of taking an operational pause. The Russian military appears to be carrying out an approach in eastern Ukraine similar to its failed efforts north of Kyiv in early March—continuing to funnel small groups of forces into unsuccessful attacks against Ukrainian defensive positions without taking the operational pause that is likely necessary to prepare for a more successful offensive campaign. Russian forces continue to grind down Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol, though ISW cannot currently assess how long these forces will hold out and their current supply status.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to grind down Ukrainian defenses in southwestern and eastern Mariupol, though ISW cannot confirm any major new territorial changes in the past 24 hours. Ukrainian defenders reported that the situation is “deteriorating” and Russian forces are deploying additional artillery and heavy weapons.**
- **Russian forces continued unsuccessful daily attacks against Rubizhne, Popasna, and Marinka and heavy shelling along the line of contact in eastern Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks from Izyum toward both Slovyansk and Barvinkove.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 15, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Ukraine Invasion Update 23

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

April 15

Key Takeaways April 8-14

- Ukraine and Russia are both unlikely to advance ceasefire negotiations until the ongoing Russian campaign in eastern Ukraine develops further. The Kremlin likely seeks to capture at minimum the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, while Kyiv seeks to further degrade the Russian military and potentially conduct major counteroffensives.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin may be purging elements of his intelligence service and blaming close allies for Russian intelligence and planning failures in the lead-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- The Kremlin is likely falsely blaming Ukrainian forces for planning or conducting provocations in areas where Russian forces intend to commit or have already committed atrocities.
- Independent actors are unlikely to be able to verify Ukraine's April 11 claim that Russian forces used chemical weapons in Mariupol, but Russian forces retain the capability to use chemical weapons beyond this specific instance.
- The Kremlin is reframing the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a Western war against Russia in a likely effort to maintain Russian domestic acceptance of the war.
- Belarus and Russia are increasing economic ties—and likely Kremlin influence over Belarus—as sanctions cut off both states from international markets.
- Finland and Sweden are increasingly reconsidering their non-aligned status and may move to join NATO in the coming months.
- Western countries continued to search for alternatives to Russian energy while the Kremlin tried to downplay the effects of Western sanctions on its economy and energy sector.
- NATO countries continue to secure their eastern borders and provide military assistance (including several high-end capabilities) to Ukraine to counter Russian aggression.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 14

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, Kateryna Stepanenko, and George Barros

April 14, 7:15pm ET

The Russian missile cruiser *Moskva*, flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, sunk on April 14 after a likely Ukrainian anti-ship missile strike on April 13. Ukrainian forces claimed to strike the *Moskva* with two Neptune anti-ship cruise missiles on April 13.^[1] The Kremlin denied this claim and stated the *Moskva* suffered damage from an accidental fire and ammunition explosion.^[2] Initial Ukrainian claims to have sunk the warship on April 13 were likely false, but the Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed the *Moskva* sank in a storm while being towed to Crimea after the crew evacuated.^[3] ISW cannot independently confirm that a Ukrainian strike sunk the *Moskva*, though Ukrainian forces likely have the capability to have done so.

The loss of the *Moskva*—regardless if from a Ukrainian strike or an accident—is a major propaganda victory for Ukraine. The sinking of the *Moskva*, which was involved in the infamous “Snake Island” incident in the early days of the Russian invasion, is a boon to Ukrainian morale as a symbol of Ukrainian capabilities to strike back at the Russian navy. The Kremlin will conversely struggle to explain away the loss of one of the most important vessels in the Russian fleet. The Kremlin's current story of losing the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet due to an accidental fire and ammunition explosion will, at minimum, likely hurt Russian morale and cannot be hidden from the Russian domestic audience. Both explanations for the sinking of the *Moskva* indicate possible Russian deficiencies—either poor air defenses or incredibly lax safety procedures and damage control on the Black Sea Fleet's flagship.

The loss of the *Moskva* will reduce Russia's ability to conduct cruise missile strikes but is unlikely to deal a decisive blow to Russian operations on the whole. The *Moskva*'s main role was likely conducting precision strikes with Kalibr cruise missiles on targets in Ukrainian rear areas, including logistics centers and airfields. These Russian strikes have been effective but limited in number compared to airstrikes and ground-launched cruise missiles throughout the invasion, and the loss of the *Moskva* is unlikely to be a decisive blow. Ukraine's possibly demonstrated ability to target Russian warships in the Black Sea may change Russian operating patterns, however, forcing them to either deploy additional air and point-defense assets to the Black Sea battlegroup or withdraw vessels from positions near the Ukrainian coast.

Key Takeaways

- **The flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet sunk on April 14 following a likely Ukrainian cruise missile strike on April 13. The loss of the *Moskva* is a significant propaganda victory for Ukraine but will likely have only limited effects on Russian operations.**
- **Ukrainian officials admitted Russian forces captured "some" personnel from Ukraine's 36th Marine Brigade in Mariupol despite initial denials, though Ukrainian defenders predominantly continued to hold out against Russian assaults.**
- **Russian forces may have committed damaged units withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine to combat operations in eastern Ukraine for the first time on April 14. Continued daily Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine are failing to take any territory.**
- **Ukrainian partisans have likely been active in the Melitopol region since at least mid-March.**
- **Russian forces continued to redeploy from Belarus to Russia for further deployment to eastern Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 14, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 13

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird

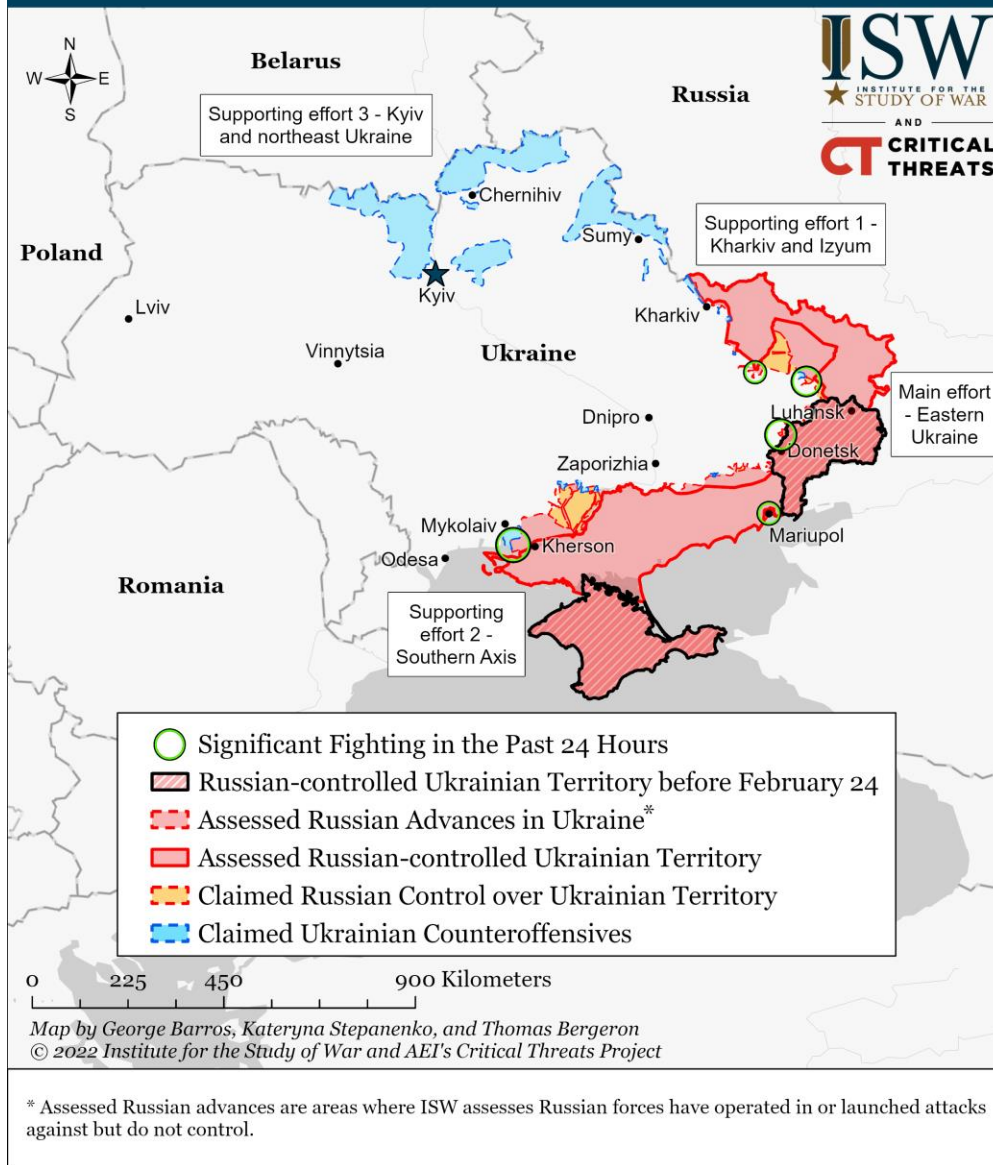
April 13, 4:30pm ET

Russian claims of a mass Ukrainian surrender in Mariupol are likely false, but Russian forces forced Ukrainian troops to abandon the Ilyich metal plant in northern Mariupol on April 13, further constricting the two remaining pockets of Ukrainian defenders. Russian forces will likely capture Mariupol in the coming week. Russian forces continued to conduct small-scale limited offensive operations on both the Izyum and Severodonetsk axes and has not yet begun a broader offensive campaign.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to take ground in Mariupol, but Russian claims of a mass Ukrainian surrender are likely false.**
- **Russian forces continued unsuccessful local attacks in eastern Ukraine amid continuing preparations for a likely wider offensive.**
- **Russian forces continued to regroup in Kharkiv Oblast for offensive operations and conducted only minor attacks south of Izyum.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 13, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 12

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

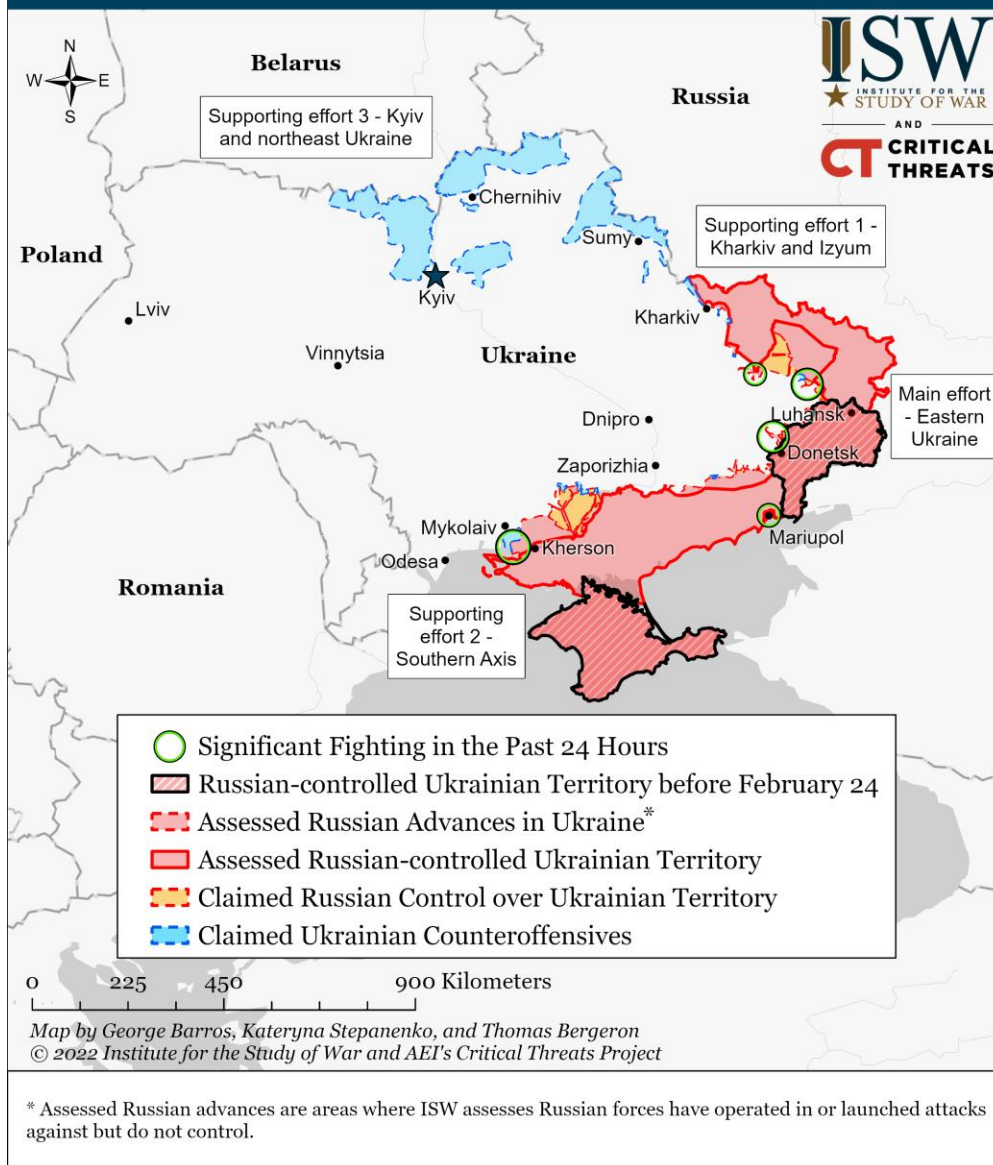
April 12, 5:30pm ET

Russia continued offensive operations in eastern Ukraine on a limited basis as it worked to reconstitute forces withdrawn from the Battle of Kyiv and to establish necessary logistical bases for increased offensive operations in the Donbas area. Russian forces withdrawn from the Kyiv region have not yet been reintroduced into Ukraine to fight. The Russian military has continued to conduct small-scale limited offensive operations on the Izyum and Severodonetsk axes and has not yet gone over to a better-resourced or broader offensive campaign. The Battle of Mariupol continues even as Ukrainian officials accuse Russia of using chemical weapons on Mariupol's defenders.

Key Takeaways

- **The Russian military continues offensive operations in Donbas and is not in a pure reconstitution phase. It has not undertaken an across-the-board operational pause while waiting for reinforcements to arrive. In part, as a result, it has made limited gains while continuing to sustain significant losses.**
- **Mariupol has not yet fallen.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 12, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 11

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

April 11, 8:30pm ET

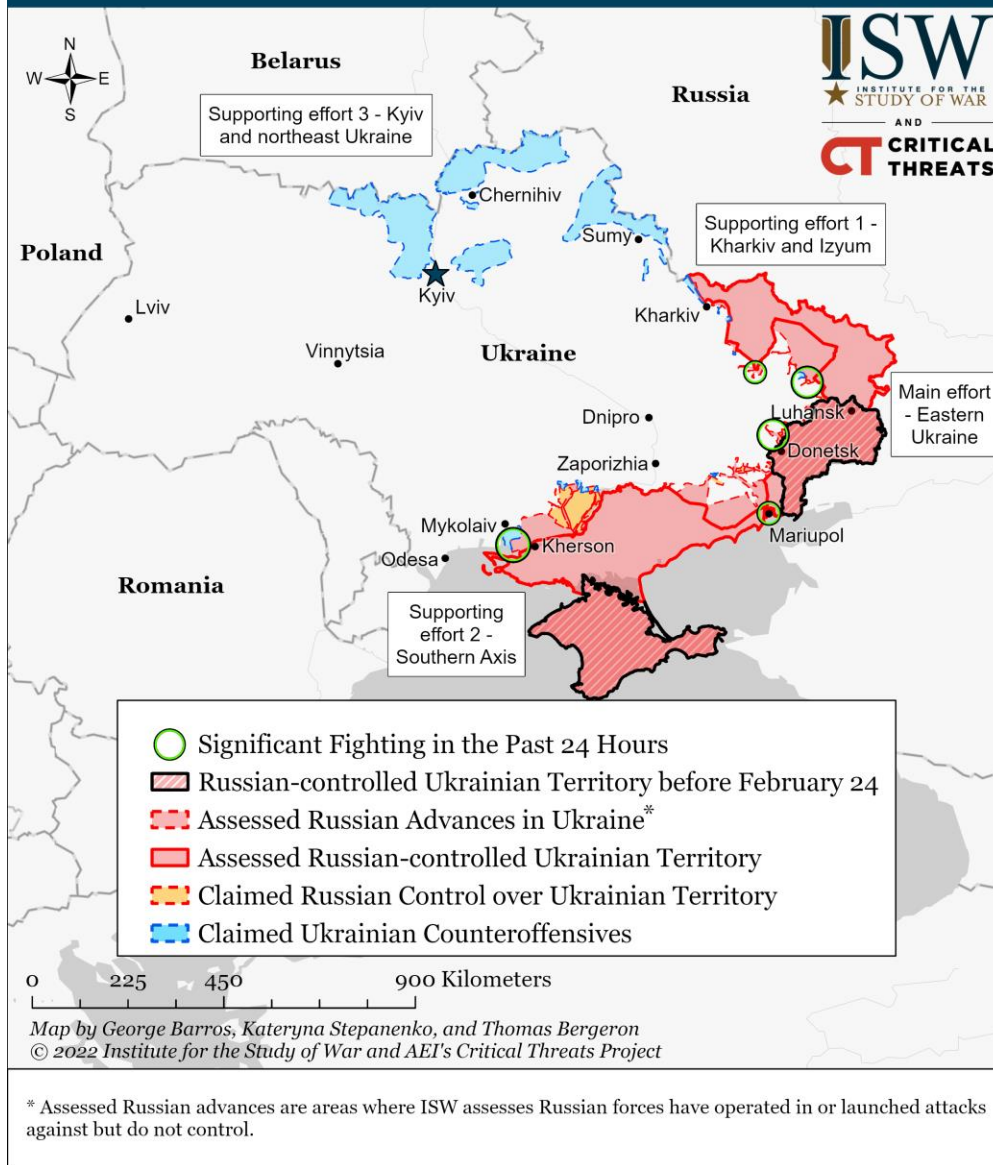
Special Edition: Army General Aleksandr Vladimirovich Dvornikov

US intelligence reported over the weekend of April 9-10 that Russian Army General Aleksandr Vladimirovich Dvornikov, commander of the Southern Military District, is now in overall command of Russian operations in Ukraine. This news is unsurprising; Dvornikov is the most senior of the three Russian military district commanders involved in the invasion, and the Russian military is concentrating its efforts almost exclusively in the area of Ukraine that Dvornikov had already been commanding. Had Putin selected another officer to command the entire war effort, he would likely have had to relieve Dvornikov for these reasons. There is no reason to suppose, therefore, that Dvornikov was specifically selected to take control of the war effort for any particular skills or experience he might have. Nor is there reason to think that the conduct of the Russian war effort will change materially more than it was already changing from the abandonment of the drive on Kyiv and the focus on the east. This update, which we are publishing in addition to our regular military operations assessments, explains Dvornikov's career history and experience in Syria, the challenges he faces, and what his appointment means for the Russian campaign in Ukraine.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian Commander of the Southern Military District Army General Alexander Dvornikov is the natural choice to take overall command of Russian operations in Ukraine. There is no reason to suppose Dvornikov was selected for any particular skills or experience, nor is there reason to think the conduct of the Russian war effort will materially change more than it was already changing due to the Russian abandonment of northeastern Ukraine and focus on the east.**
- **Russian forces may have used chemical weapons against Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol, though ISW cannot independently verify Ukrainian claims at this time.**
- **Russian forces failed to make significant advances in continued assaults on Severodonetsk, Popasna, and Rubizhne in eastern Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces continued to amass troops in Kharkiv Oblast to reinforce offensive operations on the Izyum axis and conducted several minor attacks.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 11, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 10

Mason Clark, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird

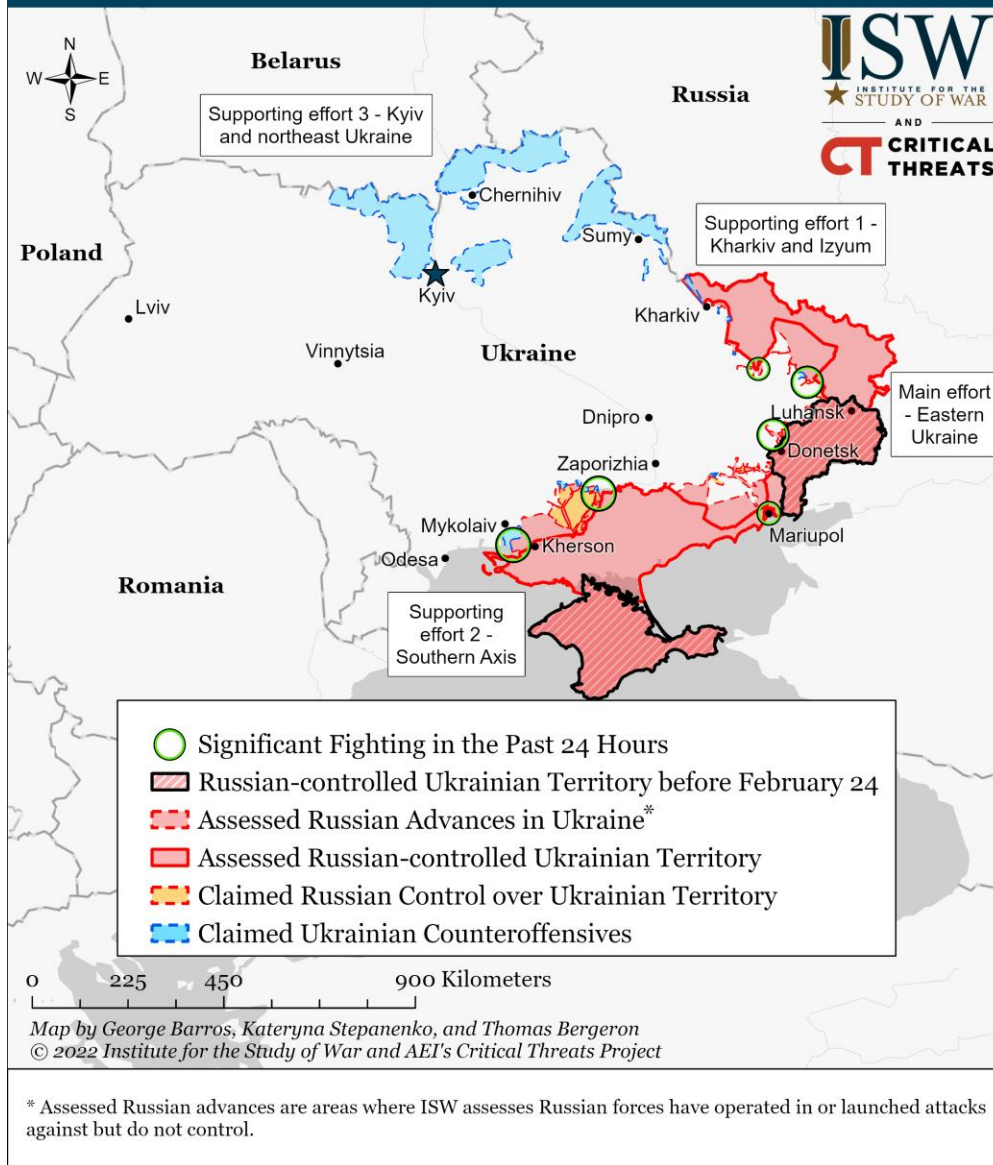
April 10, 5:00 pm ET

Russian forces made territorial gains in Mariupol in the past 24 hours and continued to reinforce operations along the Izyum-Slovyansk axis but did not make other territorial gains. Russian forces bisected Mariupol from the city center to the coast on April 10, isolating the remaining Ukrainian defenders in two main locations: the main port of Mariupol in the southwest and the Azovstal steel plant in the east. Russian forces, including a convoy of hundreds of vehicles captured in Maxar Technologies imagery on April 8, continue to reinforce Russia's offensive in Izyum to link up with Russian positions in Luhansk Oblast.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces bisected Mariupol from the city center to the coast on April 10, isolating the remaining Ukrainian defenders in the southwestern port and eastern Azovstal Steel Plant.**
- **Russian forces again made little to no progress in frontal assaults in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts but continue to cohere further reinforcements.**
- **Maxar Technologies satellite imagery captured hundreds of Russian vehicles in Kharkiv Oblast redeploying to support Russian operations near Izyum.**
- **Ukrainian counterattacks may threaten Kherson city in the coming days or weeks.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 10, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 9

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird

April 9, 4:30 pm ET

Special Edition: Russian Military Capabilities Assessments

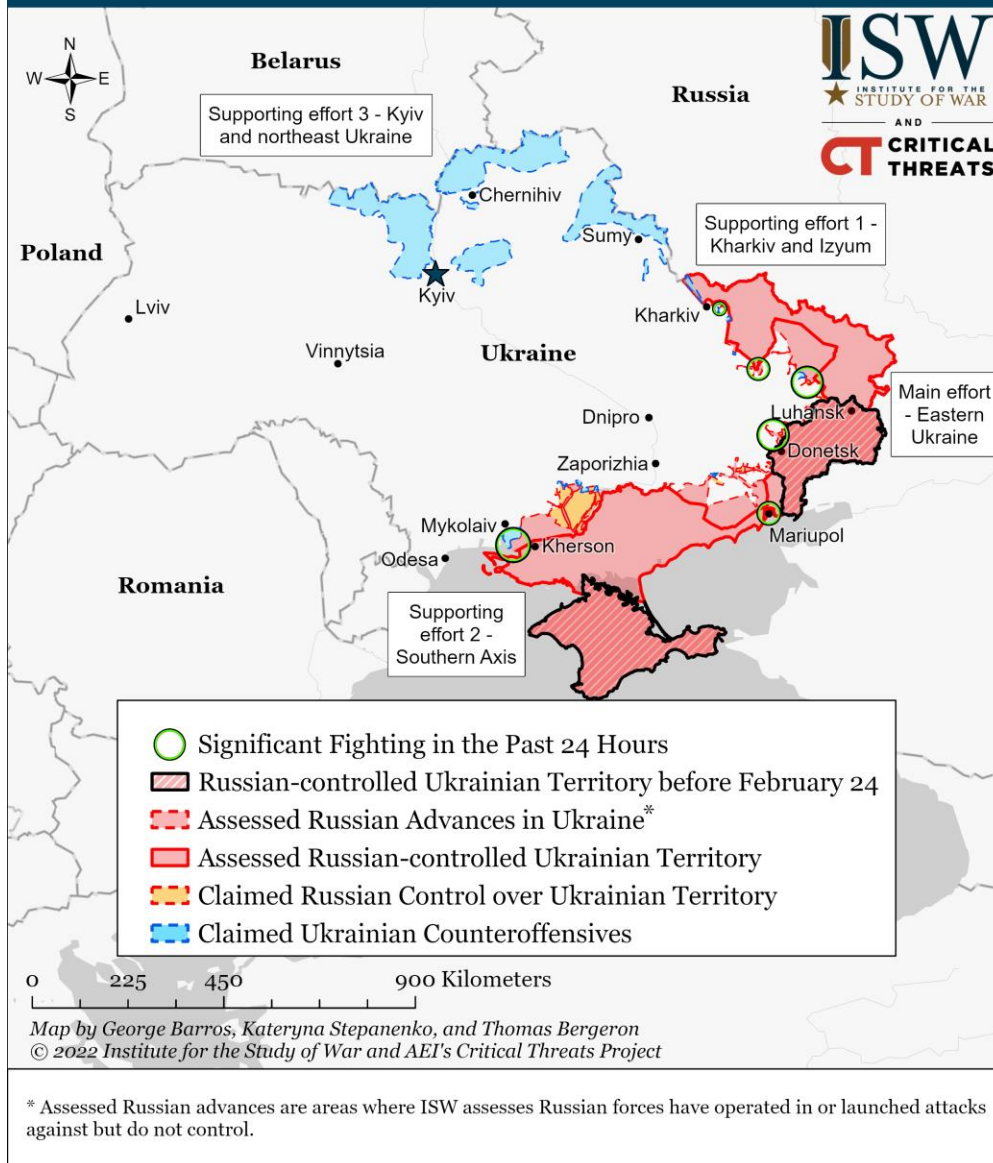
The Russian military is attempting to generate sufficient combat power to seize and hold the portions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that it does not currently control after it completes the seizure of Mariupol. There are good reasons to question the Russian armed forces' ability to do so and their ability to use regenerated combat power effectively despite a reported simplification of the Russian command structure. This update, which we offer on a day without significant military operations on which to report, attempts to explain and unpack some of the complexities involved in making these assessments.

*We discuss in this issue some instances in which American and other officials have presented information in ways that may inadvertently exaggerate Russian combat capability. **We do not in any way mean to suggest that such exaggeration is intentional.** Presenting an accurate picture of a military's combat power is inherently difficult. Doing so from classified assessments in an unclassified environment is especially so. We respect the efforts and integrity of US and allied officials trying to help the general public understand this conflict and offer the comments below in hopes of helping them in that task.*

Key Takeaways

- Russia is unlikely to be able to mass combat power for the fight in eastern Ukraine proportionate to the number of troops and battalion tactical groups it sends there.
- The Russian military continues to suffer from devastating morale, recruitment, and retention problems that seriously undermine its ability to fight effectively.
- The outcome of forthcoming Russian operations in eastern Ukraine remains very much in question.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 09, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 8

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

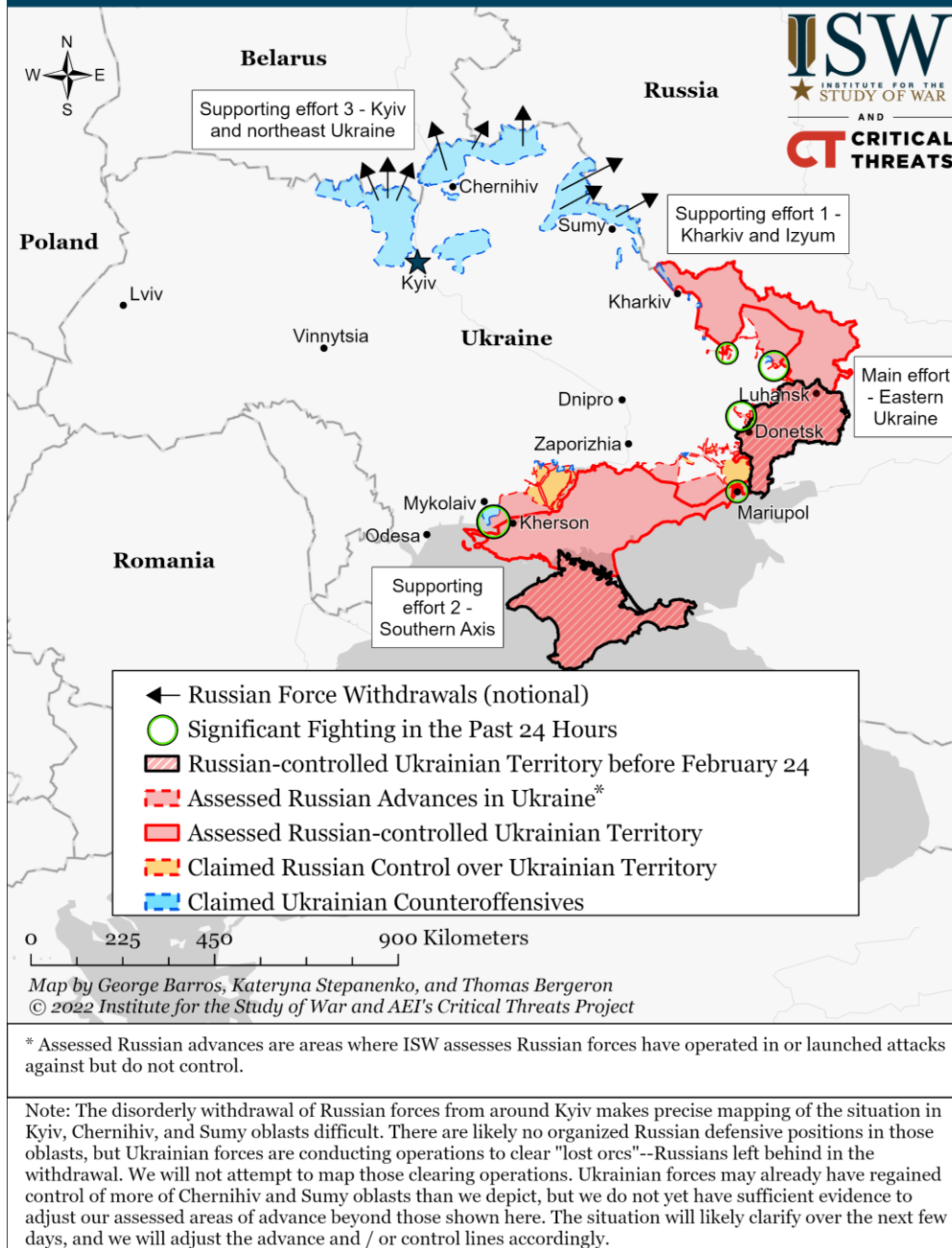
Mason Clark and Kateryna Stepanenko
April 8, 5:00pm ET

Ukrainian forces retain control of defensive positions in eastern and southwestern Mariupol, despite Russian claims to have captured most of the city. ISW was able to confirm the specific locations of ongoing Russian assaults on April 8 for the first time in several days. Russian forces continue to attempt to regroup and redeploy units withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine to support an offensive in eastern Ukraine, but these units are unlikely to enable a Russian breakthrough and face poor morale. Russian forces along the Izyum-Slovyansk axis did not make any territorial gains in the last 24 hours. Ukrainian counterattacks toward Kherson continue to threaten Russian positions around the city.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces continued to hold out against Russian assaults in areas of southwestern and eastern Mariupol, notably in the port and the Azovstal Metallurgy plant, respectively.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to repel daily Russian assaults in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.**
- **A Russian Tochka-U missile struck a civilian evacuation point at the Kramatorsk rail station in eastern Ukraine, killing at least 50 and wounding around a hundred evacuees.**
- **Russian forces continued attacks south of Izyum toward Slovyansk and Barvinkove but did not take any new territory.**
- **Ukrainian counterattacks have likely taken further territory west of Kherson, threatening Russian control of the city.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 08, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Ukraine Invasion Update 22

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

with the Critical Threats Project, AEI

April 8

The Ukraine Invasion Update is a weekly synthetic product covering key political and rhetorical events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. This update covers events from April 2-7.

Key Takeaways April 2-7

- **Russian atrocities in Ukraine, Kremlin efforts to falsely blame Ukraine for these atrocities, and continuing Ukrainian battlefield successes have reduced the willingness of the Ukrainian government and society to reach a peace agreement less than total Russian defeat.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky specified for the first time that Ukraine's desired "security guarantees" in lieu of NATO membership are written commitments from several states to provide Ukraine with immediate military aid and enact sanctions on Russia in the event of further Russian aggression.**
- **The Kremlin is blaming the United States for Russian atrocities against civilians in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, where Russian troops killed around 400 Ukrainian civilians. Western states imposed additional sanctions and expelled Russian diplomats in response to the Russian atrocities.**
- **The Kremlin is setting conditions to blame Ukraine for Russian atrocities in occupied areas and may be intentionally doing so in areas where the Kremlin knows Russian forces have already killed civilians to disguise Russian culpability.**
- **Russian forces are accelerating operations to install governance structures in occupied Ukraine and are detaining or killing Ukrainian mayors.**
- **Kremlin media increasingly seeks to justify Russian atrocities and the intentional targeting of Ukrainian civilians to a Russian domestic audience.**
- **The Kremlin is attempting to frame the global economic consequences of its invasion of Ukraine as a result of Western sanctions to call for their removal.**
- **Newly announced weapons shipments from the United Kingdom and the United States will supplement Ukrainian supplies and expand Ukrainian capabilities to target Russian forces massed in southern Ukraine and in the Black Sea.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 7

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird

April 7, 5:15 pm ET

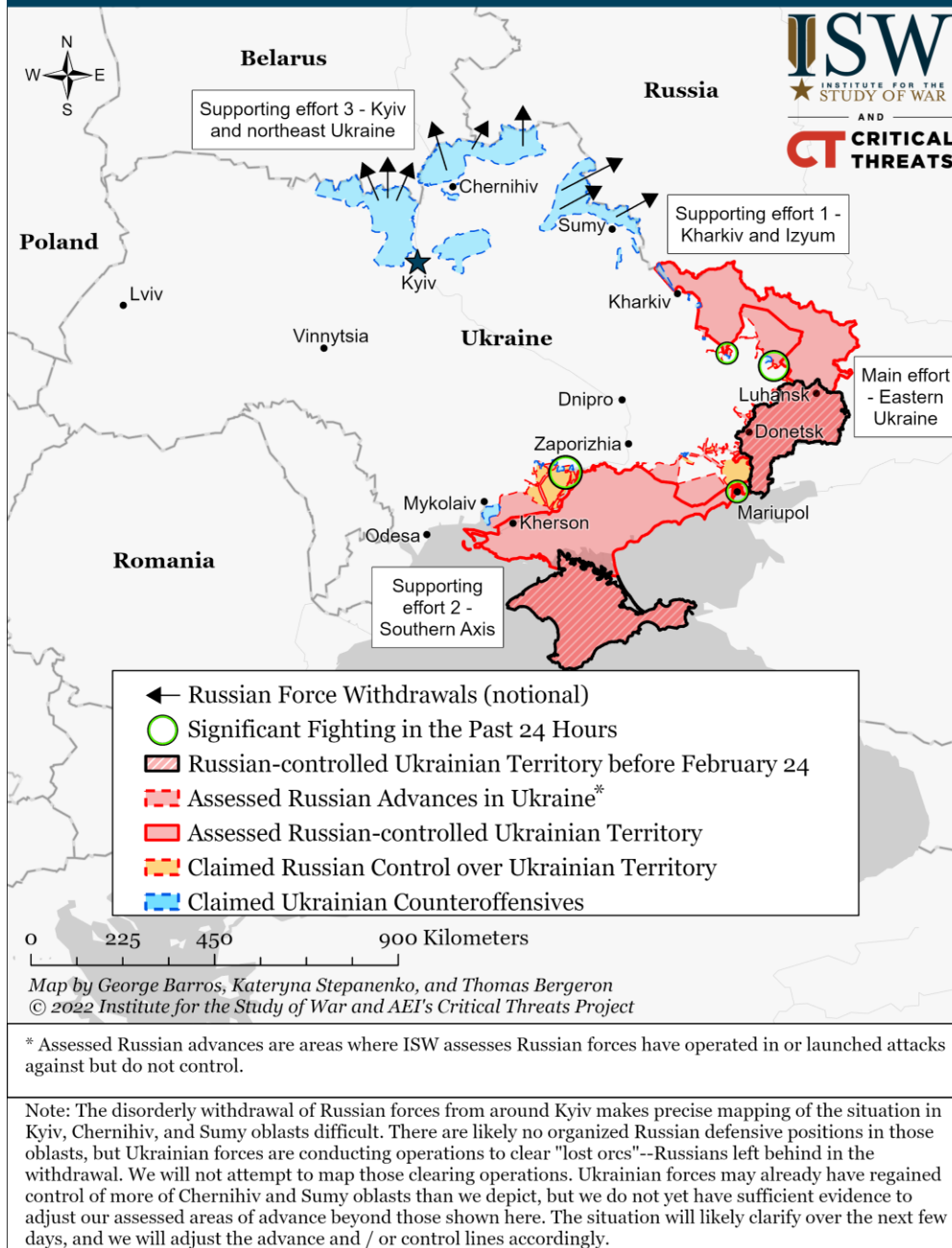
Russian proxy forces claimed to have captured central Mariupol on April 7, but Ukrainian forces retain positions in the southwest of the city. ISW cannot independently confirm this proxy claim, but we have not observed confirmed reports of fighting in central Mariupol since April 2.^[1] Russian forces will likely complete the capture of Mariupol in the coming days.

Russian forces are cohering combat power for an intended major offensive in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in the coming days. Ukrainian civil and military officials continued to warn local residents to evacuate prior to a likely Russian offensive. Russian forces will likely attempt to regroup and redeploy units withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine to support an offensive, but these units are unlikely to enable a Russian breakthrough. Russian forces along the Izyum-Sloviansk axis did not make any territorial gains in the last 24 hours. Russian forces are unlikely to successfully capture Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts if Russian forces in Izyum are unable to encircle Ukrainian forces on the line of contact in eastern Ukraine.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces claim to have successfully captured central Mariupol, but Ukrainian forces retain control of the port southwest of the city. Russian forces will likely complete the capture of Mariupol in the coming days.
- Russian forces are setting conditions for a major offensive in eastern Ukraine in the coming days, but damaged units redeployed from northeastern Ukraine are unlikely to enable a successful Russian breakthrough.
- Ukrainian forces repelled continuing Russian attacks from Izyum southeast toward Slovyansk and Barvinkove.
- Russian and Belarusian forces are conducting “demonstrative actions” to fix Ukrainian forces around Kyiv in place. However, these units are highly unlikely to launch new offensive operations, and Ukrainian units around Kyiv can likely safely redeploy to eastern Ukraine.
- Western sanctions are likely successfully disrupting Russia’s military-industrial base.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 07, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 6

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

April 6, 5:00 pm ET

Russian forces continued to redeploy forces to the Izyum-Sloviansk axis and eastern Ukraine in the past 24 hours and did not secure any major advances. Russian forces completed their withdrawal from Sumy Oblast, and Russian forces previously withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine continued to redeploy to Belgorod, Russia, for further deployment to Izyum or Donbas. The Ukrainian military reported that Russia plans to deploy elements from the Kyiv axis to Izyum, but these units will not likely regain combat effectiveness for some time.

Russian forces may be preparing for a larger offensive in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in the coming days, but are unlikely to generate the combat power necessary to break through Ukrainian defenses in continuing frontal assaults. Ukrainian officials and pro-Russian Telegram channels both reported additional Russian equipment arriving in Donbas from an unspecified location in preparation for a renewed offensive. Russian forces continued assaults in Mariupol, and we cannot confirm concrete control of terrain changes in the city. Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Izyum-Sloviansk axis but did not make any major territorial gains.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces with heavy air and artillery support continued assaults on Ukrainian positions in Mariupol in the past 24 hours.**
- **Russian and proxy forces in eastern Ukraine are likely attempting to consolidate forces and material for an offensive in the coming days.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations from Izyum towards Sloviansk but did not make any major territorial gains.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted successful counterattacks towards Kherson from both the north and west.**
- **Russian forces completely vacated Sumy Oblast.**
- **Russian General Officers are reportedly instructing commanders to severely restrict internet access among Russian personnel in an attempt to combat low morale.**
- **The US and NATO should take a strong stance on any Russian threat to use its military forces in Transnistria, the illegally Russian-occupied strip of Moldova bordering Ukraine.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 06, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: The disorderly withdrawal of Russian forces from around Kyiv makes precise mapping of the situation in Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy oblasts difficult. There are likely no organized Russian defensive positions in those oblasts, but Ukrainian forces are conducting operations to clear "lost orcs"--Russians left behind in the withdrawal. We will not attempt to map those clearing operations. Ukrainian forces may already have regained control of more of Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts than we depict, but we do not yet have sufficient evidence to adjust our assessed areas of advance beyond those shown here. The situation will likely clarify over the next few days, and we will adjust the advance and / or control lines accordingly.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 5

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Karolina Hird

April 5, 4:30 pm ET

Russian forces continued to reposition to continue their invasion in eastern and southern Ukraine, having abandoned the attack on Kyiv. They have largely completed their withdrawal from the Kyiv area and are reportedly redeploying some of the withdrawn combat forces from Belarus to Russia. Ukrainian forces are moving to regain control over segments of the state border in Chernihiv, having already done so in Kyiv and Zhytomyr Oblasts. Russian troops are pulling back toward Russia along the Sumy axis as well, but it is not yet clear if they intend to retreat all the way back to the border or will try to hold some forward positions on the Sumy axis.

Russia has not yet committed forces withdrawn from the Battle of Kyiv back into the fighting in eastern Ukraine. Russian reinforcements continuing the drive southeast from Izyum toward Slovyansk are from elements of 1st Guards Tank Army units that had been in the Kharkiv-Sumy area. Russian units that retreated from Kyiv will not likely regain combat effectiveness for some time, and it is not clear that the Russians intend to return them to the fight soon. That said, an unconfirmed Ukrainian military intelligence report suggests that Moscow could soon send the 64th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 35th Combined Arms Army, a unit that reportedly committed war crimes in Bucha, into the fight in eastern Ukraine in the hopes that guilty members of that brigade and witnesses of its war crimes are killed in combat with Ukrainian forces.^[1]

Belgorod continues to emerge as the primary concentration area for Russian forces regrouping and refitting after their retreat from Kyiv and in preparation for onward movement to their home stations or to join the fighting in the east. Elements of the Central Military District pulling back from Chernihiv Oblast are reportedly on their way to Belgorod.^[2] Their final destination is not yet known.

The Battle of Mariupol continues, with Russian forces continuing to pound the city using artillery and airpower. The constrained information environment in Mariupol prevents us from assessing concrete changes in control of terrain, but Ukrainian forces appear to be sustaining organized resistance in parts of the city.

Russian offensive operations southeast from Izyum toward Slovyansk continued on a small scale and made limited progress. Russia has not yet attempted to mass large concentrations of forces on this axis but continues instead to send individual battalion tactical groups to advance on their own.

Key Takeaways

- **The withdrawal of Russian forces from around Kyiv is nearing completion.**
- **Russia has not yet introduced forces withdrawn from western Ukraine into the fight in the east.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to put up organized resistance in parts of Mariupol.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations on the Izyum-Slovyansk axis.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 05, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 4

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Karolina Hird

April 4, 5:30 pm ET

Russian forces continue to make little to no progress in frontal assaults to capture Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, their current main effort of the war. Russian units in Donbas face growing morale and supply issues. Additionally, the Ukrainian defenders of Mariupol have outperformed ISW's previous estimates and continue to hold the city. Russian efforts to generate replacements from reservists and feed damaged units from northeastern Ukraine into frontal assaults in eastern Ukraine are unlikely to increase their chances of success.

However, Russian forces advancing from the Kharkiv axis are setting conditions to resume offensive operations through the city of Slovyansk to link up with other Russian forces in Donbas and encircle Ukrainian defenders. Russian forces captured Izyum (southeast of Kharkiv) on April 1 and have conducted active preparations to resume offensive operations for the past three days—stockpiling supplies, refitting damaged units, repairing the damaged bridge in Izyum, and conducting reconnaissance in force missions toward the southeast. Russian forces will likely begin offensive operations towards Slovyansk, 50km southeast of Izyum, in the coming days.

Efforts by Russian forces advancing from Izyum to capture Slovyansk will likely prove to be the next pivotal battle of the war in Ukraine. Russian forces likely intend to cut off Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine and will need to take Slovyansk as their minimum step to do so. If Russian forces take Slovyansk, they will then have the option to advance directly east to link up with Russian forces fighting in Rubizhne—a shorter drive that will not isolate many Ukrainian forces—or advance toward Horlivka and Donetsk to attempt a wider encirclement of Ukrainian forces. Both options could enable at least limited Russian breakthroughs in Luhansk Oblast. **If Russian forces are unable to take Slovyansk at all, Russian frontal assaults in Donbas are unlikely to independently breakthrough Ukrainian defenses and Russia's campaign to capture the entirety of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts will likely fail.**

Degraded Russian forces in northeastern Ukraine continued to withdraw to Russia and are unlikely to be effective elsewhere, despite ongoing Russian efforts to redeploy them to eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian forces are conducting operations to clear Russians left behind in the withdrawal, and Russian forces are unlikely to hold any cohesive defensive positions. The Ukrainian military reported that elements of Russian VDV (Airborne) units withdrawn from northern Kyiv flew to Belgorod, Russia, on April 4. These units are understrength, missing equipment, and likely highly demoralized. Russian servicemen from the Kyiv axis ordered to reenter combat operations may desert or refuse orders, which has occurred in several Russian units throughout the war—including several units that had not yet entered combat.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces in Izyum are setting conditions to begin offensive operations southeast toward Slovyansk in the coming days to link up with other Russian forces in Donbas and encircle Ukrainian defenders.**
- **Russian forces in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts continue to make little to no progress and face mounting casualties and declining morale. Replacements and reinforcements from northeastern Ukraine are highly unlikely to meaningfully change the balance of forces.**
- **Efforts by Russian forces advancing from Izyum to capture Slovyansk and threaten Ukrainian forces in Donbas with encirclement will likely prove to be the next pivotal battle of the war in Ukraine. If Russian forces are unable to take Slovyansk, Russia's campaign to capture the entirety of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts will likely fail.**
- **The defenders of Mariupol have outperformed ISW's previous estimates, and Russian forces are likely taking heavy casualties in ongoing efforts to capture the city.**
- **Ukrainian forces likely conducted successful counterattacks in Kherson Oblast in the last 24 hours.**
- **Russian forces have almost completely withdrawn from Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts and will likely completely vacate these regions in the coming days.**
- **Russian forces withdrawn from the Kyiv axis are highly unlikely to be effectively deployed elsewhere in Ukraine and are likely a spent force.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 04, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 3

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Karolina Hird

April 3, 3:30 pm ET

Ukraine has won the Battle of Kyiv. Russian forces are completing their withdrawal, but not in good order. Ukrainian forces are continuing to clear Kyiv Oblast of isolated Russian troops left behind in the retreat, which some Ukrainian officials describe as “lost orcs.” Russian forces had attempted to conduct an orderly retreat from their positions around Kyiv with designated covering forces supported by artillery and mines to allow the main body to withdraw. The main body of Russian troops has withdrawn from the west bank of the Dnipro and is completing its withdrawal from the east bank, but the retrograde has been sufficiently disorderly that some Russian troops were left behind.

The war is far from over and could still turn Russia’s way if the Russian military can launch a successful operation in eastern Ukraine. The current line of Russian occupation in southern and eastern Ukraine is still a significant gain in Russian-controlled territory since the start of the war. If a ceasefire or peace agreement freezes a line like the current front-line trace, Russia will be able to exert much greater pressure on Ukraine than it did before the invasion and may over time reassemble a more effective invasion force. Ukraine’s victory in the Battle of Kyiv is thus significant but not decisive.

The disorder of the Russian withdrawal suggests that at least some of the units now reconcentrating in Belarus and western Russia will remain combat ineffective for a protracted period. Russian troops attempting to refit after pulling back from around Kyiv will likely have to reconsolidate into their units, identify which soldiers are still present, sort out their equipment and assess its combat readiness, and generally reconstitute before they can even begin to receive replacements and new equipment and prepare for further combat operations.

Russian forces are likely abandoning the east bank of the Dnipro fully as well, withdrawing from around Chernihiv to the north and from Brovary to the east. Russian troops will likely seek to hold a salient around Konotop and Sumy long enough to allow their forces to complete their retrograde from near Kyiv but will then likely withdraw back to Russia from almost all their positions west of Kharkiv.

Moscow is attempting to concentrate reserves and some units pulled from the fight around Sumy to reinforce its offensive operations in the east but is encountering serious challenges in that effort. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on April 3 that Russian soldiers are resisting and in some cases refusing orders to enter or re-enter the war effort. The General Staff asserted that the two battalion tactical groups (BTGs) that moved from South Ossetia toward Donbas less than a week ago refused to fight and that plans to move them back to South Ossetia are in train.[1] The General Staff claimed that about 25 soldiers of the Russian 31st Separate Airborne Brigade refused orders to re-enter combat citing excessive losses.[2] The General Staff also asserted that commanders at various echelons in the Russian 3rd Motorized Rifle Division have refused to participate in combat operations.[3] We have no independent verification of these reports, but they are credible in light of the losses Russian forces have suffered and of independent reports of Russian soldiers killing commanders and commanders committing suicide from earlier in the conflict.

Russian efforts to advance its offensive operations in eastern Ukraine made limited progress in the past 24 hours. Fighting continues in Mariupol and on the Izyum-Severodonetsk axis.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukraine has won the Battle of Kyiv, and Russian forces are completing their withdrawals from both the east and the west banks of the Dnipro in disorder.**
- **Russian forces retreating from around Kyiv will likely need considerable time before they can return to combat.**
- **Incidents of refusals of orders to engage in combat operations among Russian units continue and may lead to the redeployment of two BTGs that had arrived near Donbas within the last few days to their home stations in South Ossetia.**
- **The continued existence of an independent Ukrainian state with its capital in Kyiv is no longer in question at this time, although much fighting remains and the war could still turn Russia’s way.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 03, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 2

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Karolina Hird

April 2, 5:00 pm ET

Continuing Russian operations along their new main effort in eastern Ukraine made little progress on April 2, and Russian forces likely require some time to redeploy and integrate reinforcements from other axes. Ukrainian forces repelled likely large-scale Russian assaults in Donbas on April 2 and inflicted heavy casualties. Russian forces continued to capture territory in central Mariupol and will likely capture the city in the coming days. Russian units around Kyiv and in northeastern Ukraine continued to successfully withdraw into Belarus and Russia, and heavy mining in previously Russian-occupied areas is forcing Ukrainian forces to conduct slow clearing operations.

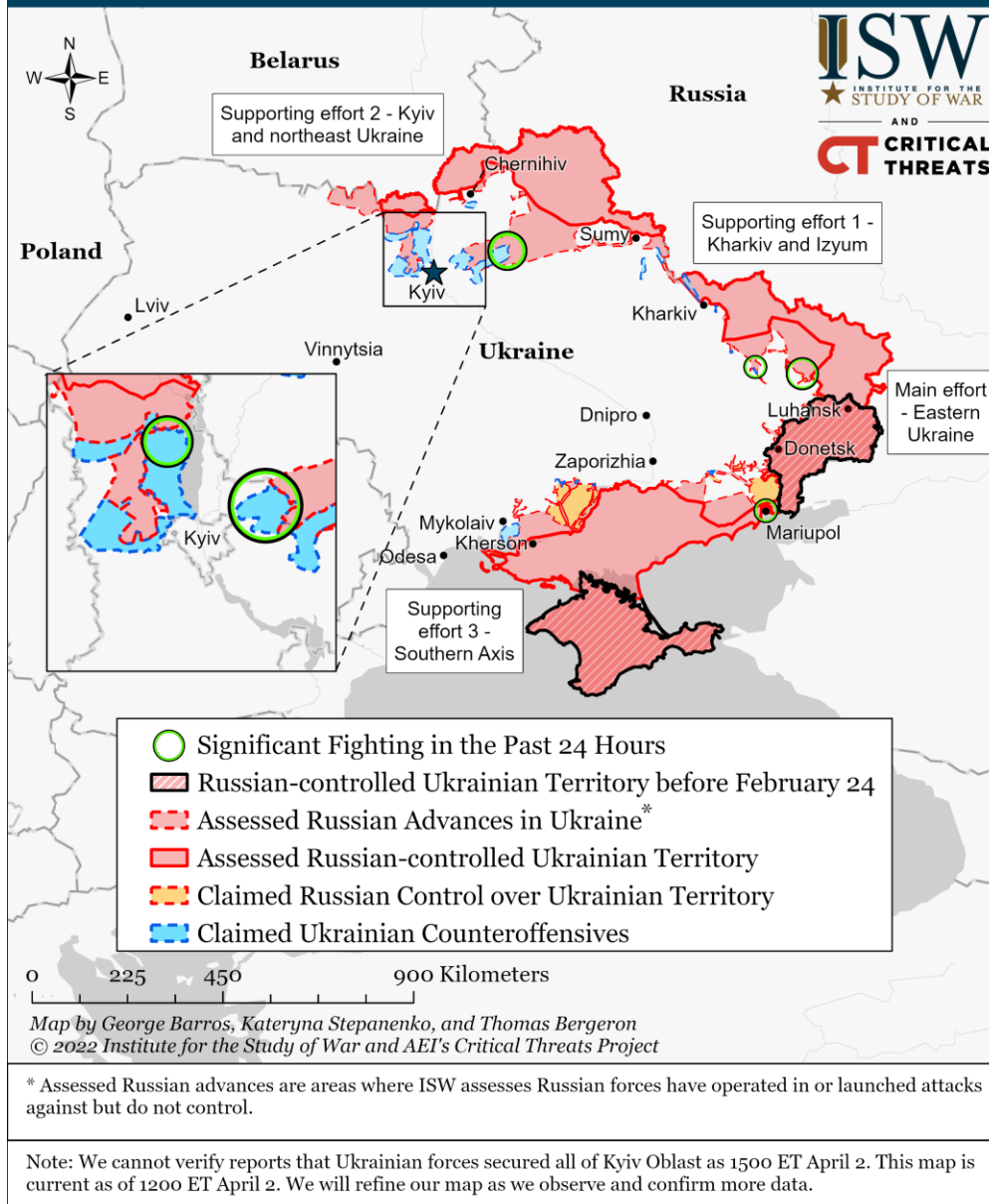
However, the Russian units withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine for redeployment to eastern Ukraine are heavily damaged. Russian forces likely require an extensive operational pause to refit existing units in Donbas, refit and redeploy reinforcements from other axes, and integrate these forces—pulled from several military districts that have not yet operated on a single axis—into a cohesive fighting force. We have observed no indicators of Russian plans to carry out such a pause, and Russian forces will likely fail to break through Ukrainian defenses if they continue to steadily funnel already damaged units into fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued to capture territory in central Mariupol on April 2 and will likely capture the city within days.**
- **Ukrainian forces repelled several possibly large-scale Russian assaults in Donbas, claiming to destroy almost 70 Russian vehicles.**
- **Russian forces will likely require a lengthy operational pause to integrate reinforcements into existing force structures in eastern Ukraine and enable successful operations but appear unlikely to do so and will continue to bleed their forces in ineffective daily attacks.**
- **Russian forces in Izyum conducted an operational pause after successfully capturing the city on April 1 and will likely resume offensive operations to link up with Russian forces in Donbas in the coming days.**
- **Russia continued to withdraw forces from the Kyiv axis into Belarus and Russia. Ukrainian forces primarily conducted operations to sweep and clear previously Russian-occupied territory.**
- **Ukrainian forces likely repelled limited Russian attacks in Kherson Oblast.**
- **The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces have rendered two-thirds of the 75 Russian Battalion Tactical Groups it assesses have fought in Ukraine either temporarily or permanently combat ineffective.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 02, 2022, 12:00 PM ET



Ukraine Invasion Update 21

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

with the Critical Threats Project, AEI

April 2

The Ukraine Invasion Update is a semi-weekly synthetic product covering key political and rhetorical events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. This update covers events from March 30-April 1. All of the ISW Russia's team's coverage of the war in Ukraine—including daily military assessments and maps, past Conflict Updates, and several supplemental assessments—are available on our [Ukraine Crisis Coverage](#) landing page.

Key Takeaways March 30-April 1

- **Ongoing peace talks will likely protract, and the Kremlin is unlikely to withdraw its main demands in the near future.**
- **Russia and Ukraine may have reached initial agreements on Ukrainian “neutrality” in ongoing negotiations, but remain stalled on the Kremlin’s refusal to discuss Crimea and the Donbas.**
- **The Kremlin set additional conditions on March 30-April 1 for a chemical or biochemical false-flag attack in eastern Ukraine or Russia.**
- **Ongoing European efforts to find alternatives to Russian energy likely successfully undercut a Kremlin attempt to buttress the Russian economy by coercing Europe into buying Russian gas in rubles.**
- **Sustained Western military aid to Ukraine will help enable further Ukrainian counterattacks in the coming weeks.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 1

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Karolina Hird

April 1, 7:00 pm ET

ISW assesses that the Kremlin has revised its campaign plan in Ukraine after the failure of its initial campaign to capture Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities and its subsequent failure to adjust its operations in late March. ISW previously assessed that the initial Russian campaign of the war—airborne and mechanized operations to seize Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and other major Ukrainian cities to force a change of government in Ukraine—had failed as of March 19.[1] The Russian military continued to feed small collections of reinforcements into operations around Kyiv and across northeastern and southern Ukraine in an effort to keep its initial campaign plan alive throughout late March. We assess that the Russian military has now halted these failed efforts and is beginning a new phase of its campaign in Ukraine with new objectives. We are updating the structure of our campaign assessments to reflect the new structure and prioritization of Russian operations.

Russia’s main effort is now focused on eastern Ukraine, with two subordinate main efforts: capturing the port city of Mariupol and capturing the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

The Kremlin claims the entirety of these oblasts as the territory of its proxies in eastern Ukraine, the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR).[2] The Kremlin is increasingly redeploying troops from other axes of advance and channeling its remaining reinforcements from Russia into eastern Ukraine. Russian forces are unlikely to conduct active operations on other fronts in the coming weeks.

The Kremlin may intend to capture Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts before seeking to negotiate a Kremlin-favorable ceasefire and claim that Russia has achieved its war aims. The Kremlin’s initial false justification for its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine was to protect the DNR and LNR from Ukraine and enable them to seize their “claimed” territory. The Kremlin is attempting to gloss over the failure of Russia’s initial campaign for a domestic Russian audience. The Kremlin has in fact been forced to alter its operations after the failure of its initial campaign. **Kremlin claims that Russian forces solely attacked northeastern Ukraine to degrade Ukrainian forces before achieving the “main goal” of capturing Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts – such as statements made by the Russian General Staff on March 25 – are false.**[3]

Russian forces have three supporting efforts: Kharkiv and Izyum; Kyiv and northeastern Ukraine; and the southern axis, including Kherson.

- **Russian forces on the Kharkiv axis have abandoned efforts to take the city. Their new objectives are likely to 1) pin Ukrainian mechanized forces in place, and 2) drive southeast to**

link up with Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast. Russian forces captured Izyum (southeast of Kharkiv) on April 1 after attempting to do so since at least March 7.^[4] Russian forces, including elements redeployed from the Sumy axis in the past week, will likely continue offensive operations in the coming days in an effort to cut off Ukrainian forces on the line of contact in Donbas.

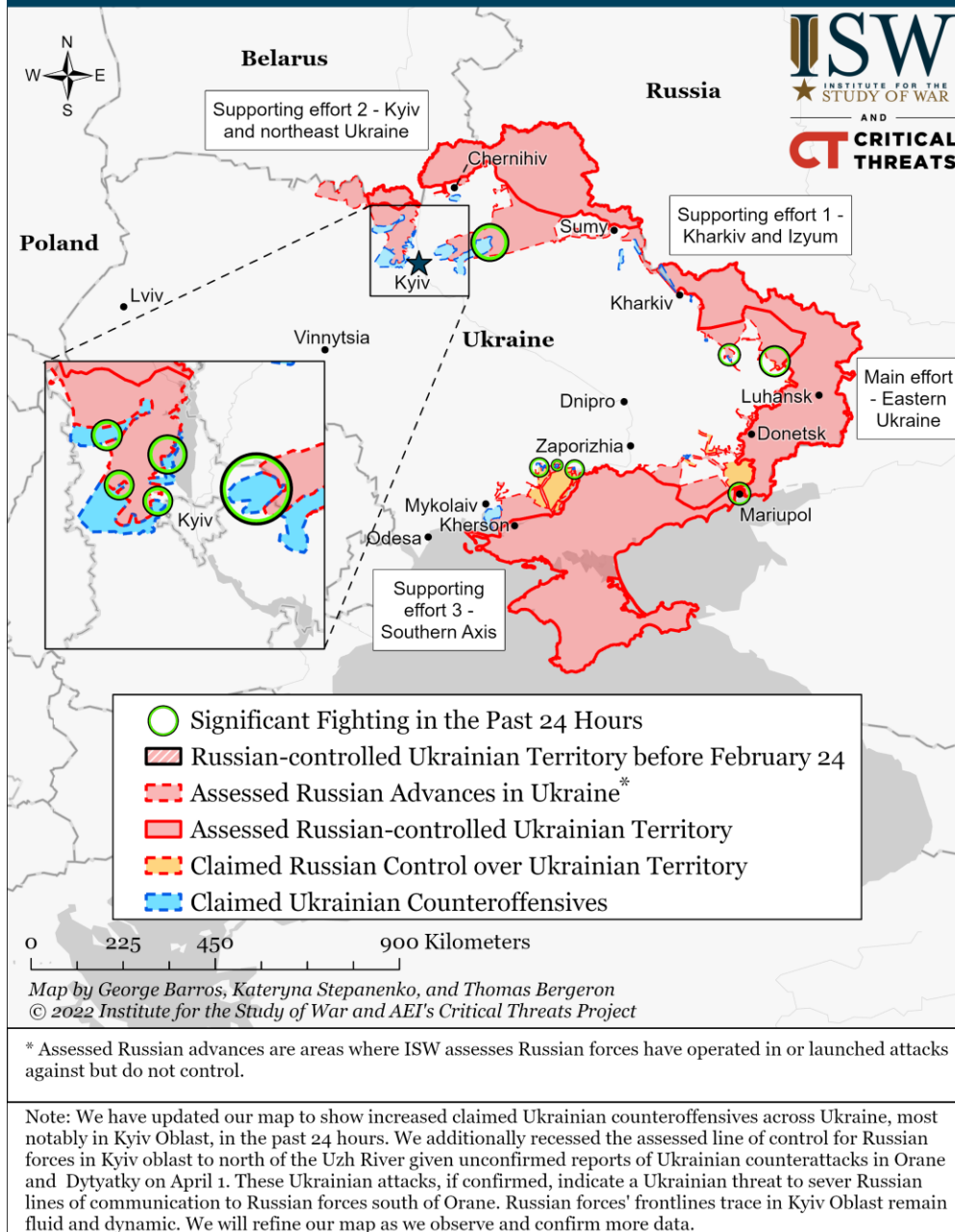
- **Russian forces around Kyiv and in northeastern Ukraine seek to conduct a retrograde action—the orderly withdrawal of combat forces—for refit and further redeployment to other axes of advance.** Russian forces remaining on the forward trace of Russian lines are a covering force intended to screen the retrograde of most of the combat power previously deployed around Kyiv. Ukrainian forces retook substantial territory both northwest and east of Kyiv in the past 24 hours. Ukrainian forces likely advanced faster than Russian forces anticipated, but Russian forces successfully withdrew much of the damaged combat power remaining around Kyiv into Belarus.
- **Russian forces on the southern axis—centered on Kherson—are unlikely to conduct offensive operations in the near future and will aim to defend Russian-occupied territory around Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks.** Russian forces will additionally likely prioritize securing southern Ukraine against increasingly frequent Ukrainian partisan actions. Russian forces are unlikely to resume offensive operations west toward Mykolayiv or north toward Zaporizhzhia and Kryvyi Rih in the near future.

Key Takeaways

- **We now assess that Russia has revised its campaign plan in Ukraine after the failure of operations to seize Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities throughout March.**
- **The Kremlin's claims that Russia's main objective has been eastern Ukraine throughout the war are false and intended to obfuscate the failure of Russia's initial campaign.**
- **Russia's main effort is now concentrated on eastern Ukraine. Russian forces seek to capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.**
- **Russian forces will likely take Mariupol in the coming days but continue to suffer heavy casualties.**
- **Russian forces seek to fix in place the Ukrainian forces around Kharkiv.**
- **Russian forces captured Izyum after three weeks of fighting on April 1 and will attempt to advance southeast to link up with Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast in the coming days.**
- **Ukrainian forces recaptured large swathes of terrain both northwest and east of Kyiv in the past 24 hours, but Russia successfully withdrew elements of its damaged forces into Belarus.**
- **The Kremlin will continue to funnel reinforcements (including both low-quality individual replacements from Russia and damaged units redeployed from northeastern Ukraine) into operations in eastern Ukraine, but these degraded forces are unlikely to enable Russia to conduct successful large-scale offensive operations.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 01, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



The Risks of a Russian Ceasefire Offer

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nataliya Bugayova

Ukraine may soon face a new threat in this war—Russia’s ceasefire offer. It seems odd to say that a ceasefire is a threat. Once war begins, the default position in the West is to seize the earliest opportunity to “stop the fighting.” But while some ceasefires lead to peace, others lead to more war—as the Russians have repeatedly shown. The frontlines frozen in a ceasefire set the conditions for the negotiations and reconstruction that follow. They also set conditions for future conflict. Those seeking enduring peace in Ukraine must resist the temptation to accept a Russian ceasefire offer that sets conditions for renewed conflict on Russia’s terms or gives Russia leverage on Ukraine with which to force concessions and surrenders.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 31

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Karolina Hird

March 31, 6:00 pm ET

Ukrainian forces conducted several local counterattacks around Kyiv, in northeastern Ukraine, and toward Kherson on March 31, successfully pressuring Russian forces and seeking to disrupt ongoing Russian troop rotations. Ukrainian forces northwest of Kyiv pushed Russian forces north of the E-40 highway and will likely assault Russian-held Bucha and Hostomel in the coming days. Ukrainian forces exploited limited Russian withdrawals east of Brovary to retake territory across Kyiv and Chernihiv Oblasts. Ukrainian forces likely conducted counterattacks toward Sumy in the past 24 hours as well, though ISW cannot independently confirm these reports. Finally, Ukrainian forces conducted limited counterattacks in northern Kherson Oblast. Russian forces only conducted offensive operations in Donbas and against Mariupol in the last 24 hours and did not make any major advances.

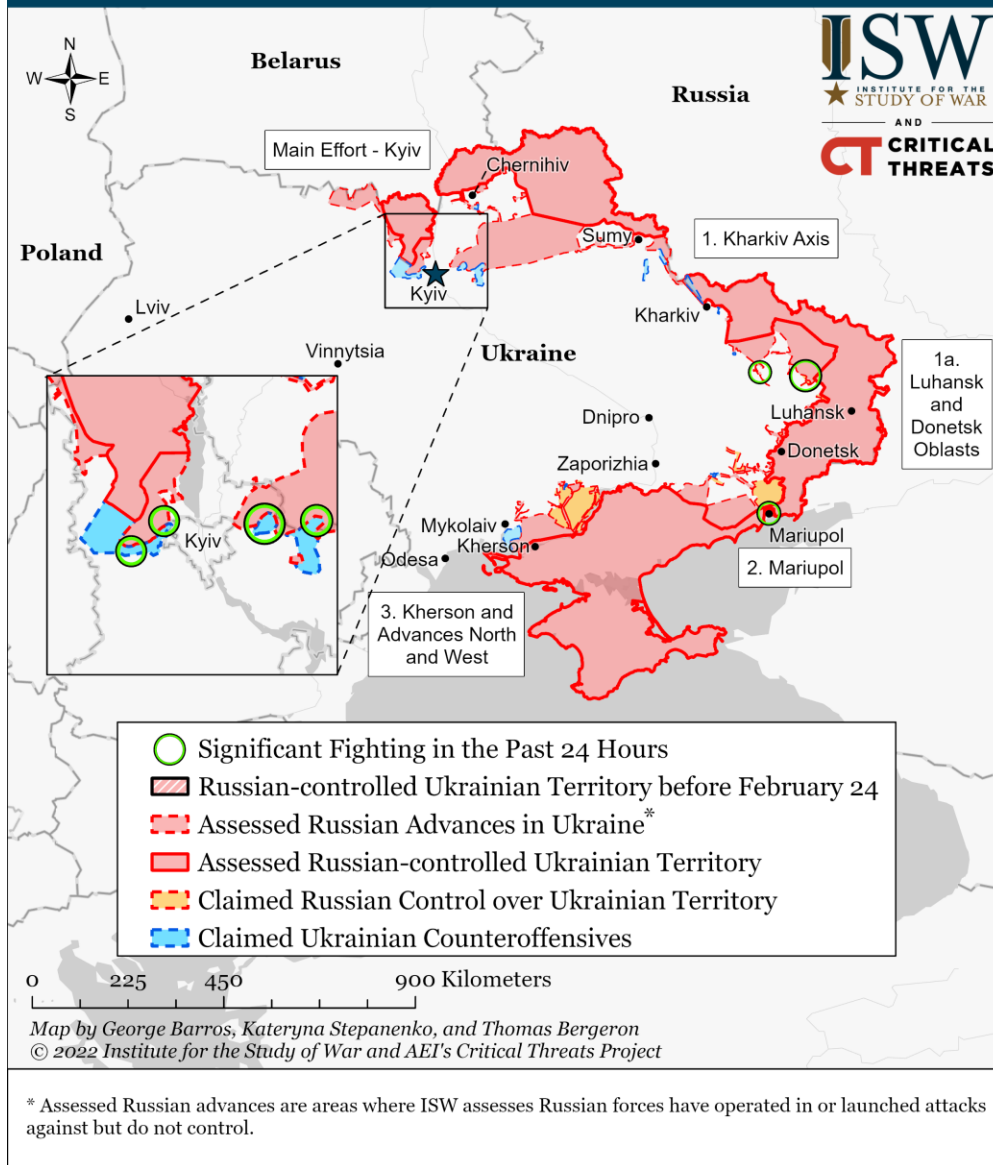
Russian efforts to redeploy damaged units from the Kyiv and Sumy axes to eastern Ukraine are unlikely to enable Russian forces to conduct major gains. Russia continued to withdraw elements of the 35th and 36th Combined Arms Armies and 76 Air Assault Division from their positions northwest of Kyiv into Belarus for refit and likely further redeployment to eastern Ukraine. However, these units are likely heavily damaged and demoralized. Feeding damaged Eastern Military District units directly into operations in eastern Ukraine—predominantly conducted by the Southern Military District—will likely prove ineffective and additionally introduce further command-and-control challenges for the Russian military. Russian forces will likely attempt to retain their current front lines around Kyiv and in northeastern Ukraine and will continue to dig in on these fronts; ISW has not seen any indicators of Russian forces fully relinquishing captured territory. However, Ukrainian counterattacks are likely disrupting Russian efforts to redeploy and refit their forces and will continue in the coming days.

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces successfully conducted local counterattacks around Kyiv, towards Sumy, and in Kherson Oblast and will likely take further territory—particularly northwest and east of Kyiv—in the coming days.**
- **Russia is withdrawing elements of its damaged forces around Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy for redeployment to eastern Ukraine, but these units are unlikely to provide a decisive shift in Russian combat power.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to repel Russian assaults throughout Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, and Russian forces failed to take territory in the past 24 hours.**
- **Russian forces continue to steadily advance in Mariupol.**
- **Russia’s preplanned spring draft will begin on April 1 and does not appear abnormal from Russia’s typical conscription cycle. Newly drafted conscripts will not provide Russia with additional combat power for many months.**
- **The Kremlin is likely accelerating efforts to establish quasi-state entities to govern occupied Ukrainian territory.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 31, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 30

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko
March 30, 5:30 pm ET

Russia is withdrawing some elements of its forces around Kyiv into Belarus for likely redeployment to other axes of advance and did not conduct any offensive operations around the city in the past 24 hours, but Russian forces will likely continue to hold their forwardmost

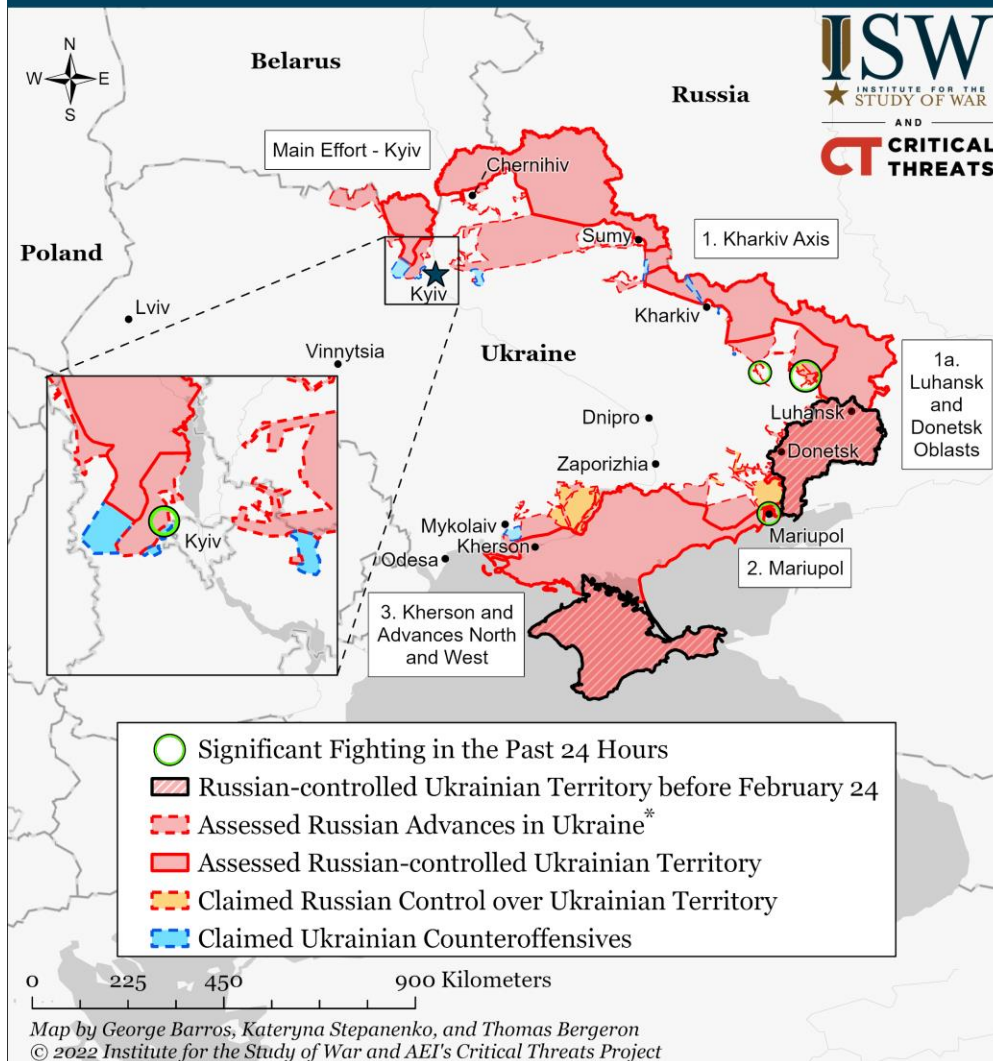
positions and shell Ukrainian forces and residential areas. Ukrainian forces repelled several Russian attacks in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in the past 24 hours and Russian forces likely continued to take territory in Mariupol. Russian forces held their positions and did not conduct offensive operations throughout the rest of the country. Russian forces will likely capture Mariupol in the coming days but likely suffered high casualties taking the city, and Russian force generation efforts and the redeployment of damaged units from the Kyiv axis are increasingly unlikely to enable Russian forces to make rapid gains in the Donbas region.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces around Kyiv held their forward positions and continued to defend against limited Ukrainian counterattacks. Russian forces are unlikely to give up their secured territory around the city and are continuing to dig in.**
- **ISW can confirm Russia is withdrawing some units around Kyiv for likely redeployment to other axes of advance, but *cannot* confirm any changes in Russian force posture around Chernihiv as of this time.**
- **Russian forces did not conduct any offensive operations in northeastern Ukraine in the past 24 hours.**
- **Elements of the 20th Combined Arms Army and 1st Guards Tank Army are redeploying to support Russian operations on Izyum, but are unlikely to take the city in the near future.**
- **Ukrainian forces repelled continuing Russian assaults in Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts. Russian forces continued to take territory in Mariupol but are likely suffering high casualties.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 30, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: We have updated our map to show increased Russian areas of controlled terrain and advances around Ivankiv based on observing new data about Russian forces operating in that area. This expanded area in our map of March 30 does not indicate that Russian forces made further gains, only that we have received sufficiently detailed and reliable reporting of previous gains to adjust our map. ISW will update its assessments based on verified information.

Ukraine Invasion Update 20

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

with the Critical Threats Project, AEI

March 30

The Ukraine Invasion Update is a semi-weekly synthetic product covering key political and rhetorical events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. This update covers events from March 25-29. All of the ISW Russia's team's coverage of the war in Ukraine – including daily military assessments and maps, past Conflict Updates, and several supplemental assessments – are available on our [Ukraine Crisis Coverage](#) landing page.

Key Takeaways March 25-29

- **The Kremlin is falsely presenting its partial withdrawal of Russian forces from Kyiv and Chernihiv as a major Russian concession in service of peace talks with Ukraine. In reality, Russian forces are withdrawing to recuperate after suffering severe losses in their failed operations to seize those cities.**
- **Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko continues to withstand Russian pressure to enter the war in Ukraine on Russia's behalf.**
- **The Kremlin is intensifying its internal censorship and crackdown on entities in Russia that do not cover the war in the Kremlin's preferred terms.**
- **The Kremlin denied reports of increased conscription on March 26 but is likely beginning a broader mobilization that will coincide with Russia's annual spring conscription on April 1. These new conscription drives are unlikely to generate effective Russian combat power for many months, at the earliest.**
- **The Kremlin maintained its defamatory narratives about claimed US involvement in Ukrainian biolaboratories and Russian nuclear capabilities to discredit and intimidate the West.**
- **The Kremlin continued to downplay the effects of Western sanctions on the Russian economy and threatened the West with counter-sanctions leveraging Russian energy exports.**

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 29](#)

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko
March 29, 5:00 ET

The Russians have not yet abandoned their attacks on Kyiv, claims by Russian Defense Ministry officials notwithstanding. Russian forces continued fighting to hold their forwardmost positions on the eastern and western Kyiv outskirts even as badly damaged units withdrew to Russia from elsewhere on the Kyiv and Chernihiv axes. The Russian high command has likely concluded that it cannot seize Kyiv and may not be able to move artillery closer to the center of the city. It may have decided to stop its previous practices of forcing units that have already taken devastating losses to continue hopeless offensive operations and of feeding individual battalion tactical groups into the battle as they become available rather than concentrating them to achieve decisive effects. Russian officials are likely casting these decisions driven by military realities as overtures demonstrating Russia's willingness to engage in serious ceasefire or peace negotiations, possibly to conceal the fact that they have accepted the failure of their efforts on the Kyiv axis.

Russia continues to reinforce its efforts in Ukraine's northeast likely attempting to link its positions southeast of Kharkiv and Izyum with its forces in Luhansk Oblast. The Russians have reportedly redirected forces from the Chernihiv-Kharkiv axis to the Izyum-Sloviansk axis, most likely reassigning reinforcements rather than redeploying units already committed to fighting. Russian forces in the Izyum-Sloviansk area continue fighting to hold and expand their penetration to the southeast.

The Russian advance in Mariupol continues to gain ground, and Russian forces have likely bisected or even trisected the city. Pockets of Ukrainian defenders continue to hold out in Mariupol, likely in several areas, but the Russians will likely complete the conquest of the city within days. Russian forces have likely taken significant casualties in the tough urban fighting in Mariupol, making it difficult to evaluate how much combat power the Russians will be able to harvest from Mariupol to use for further advances north and west.

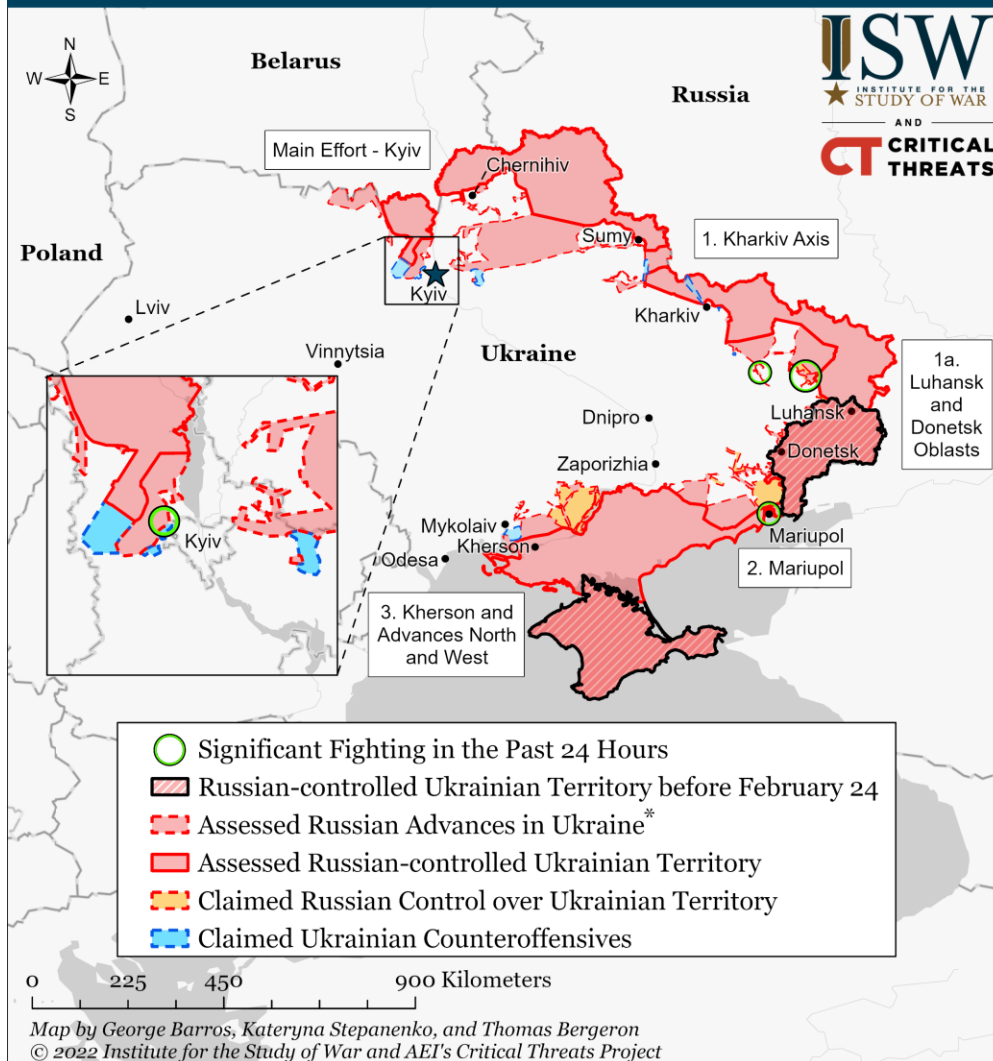
Russian operations in southeastern Ukraine have left large portions of Donetsk Oblast under Ukrainian control. Securing the boundaries of Donetsk Oblast along with the entirety of Luhansk Oblast will likely require a major offensive operation. Much of the area of Donetsk Oblast outside Russian control is flat and sparsely populated—terrain similar to that on which Russian forces elsewhere have been able to advance rapidly, at least earlier in the war. Russian offensive operations in similar terrain more recently have struggled, however. It is too soon to tell how feasible the Russian conquest of all of Donetsk and Luhansk will be for the Russian military in its current state.

Key Takeaways

- **We now assess that Russian forces have given up on encircling or seizing Kyiv at this time. Russian forces continue to fight to hold their current front-line trace near the city, however, remaining dug into positions to the east, northwest, and west. Russian forces withdrawing from the area around Kyiv appear to be moving north from behind the front line to positions in Belarus.**
- **Russia is directing some reserves to the effort to connect gains southeast of Kharkiv and Izyum with its front line in Luhansk.**
- **Ukrainian forces continue to defend in likely isolated pockets in Mariupol. The city will likely fall to the Russians within days.**
- **A Russian offensive operation to take the rest of unoccupied Donetsk Oblast would be a significant undertaking. It remains unclear if Russia can harvest enough combat power from Mariupol after securing the city or divert reinforcements from elsewhere on a large enough scale to complete it.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: We have updated our map to show decreased Russian areas of controlled terrain around Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts based on observing new data about Russian force withdrawals from those areas. Russian forces may be preparing to take up a defensive position along the Snov River east of Chernihiv, as they have destroyed bridges in a number of towns along that river according to the March 28 Ukrainian General Staff report. We also downgraded assessed Russian control in Sumy near Trostianets and Boromilia, given unconfirmed reports of Ukrainian counterattacks in Krasnopillia and Slavhorod. ISW will update its assessments based on verified information.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 28

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark and George Barros

March 28, 4:30pm ET

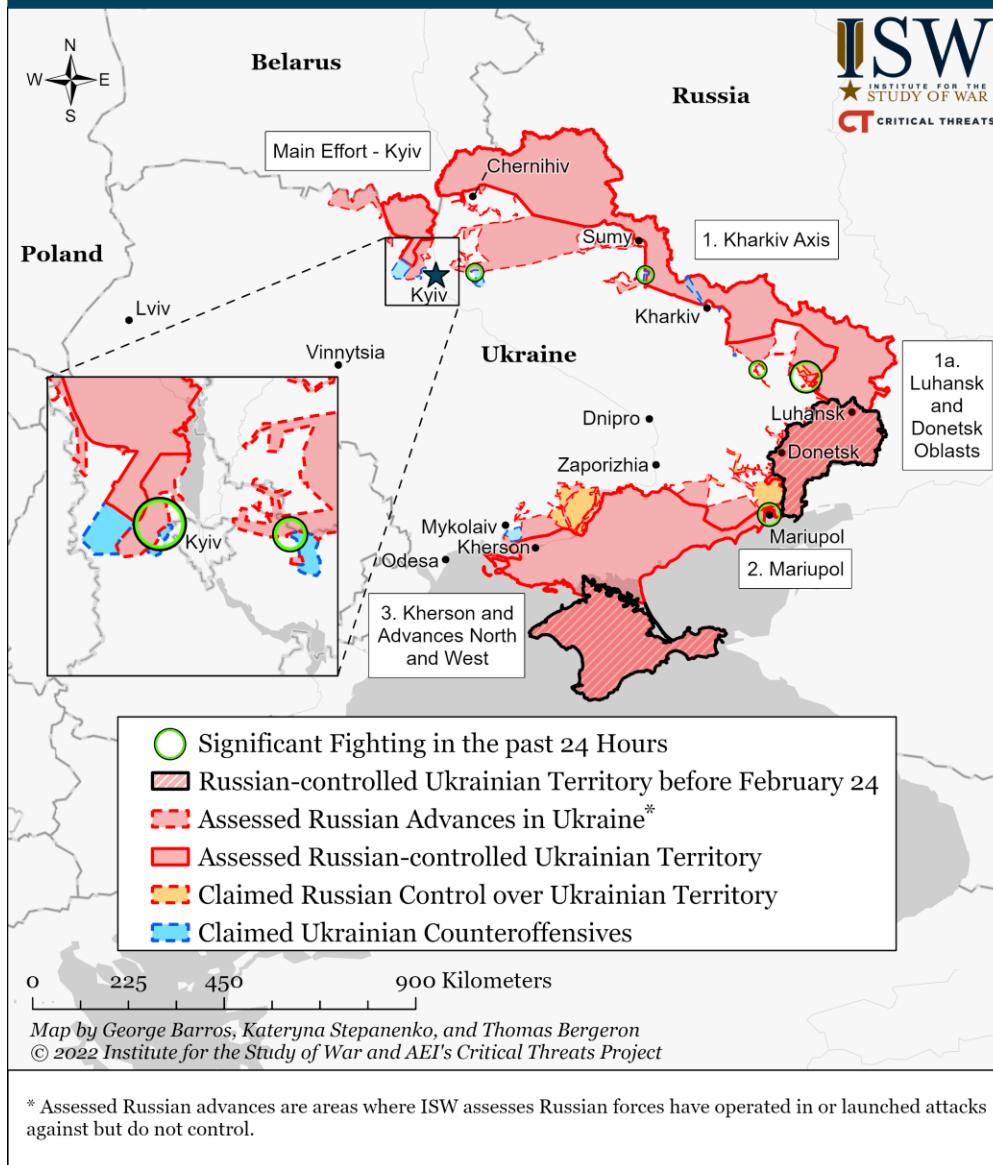
Ukrainian forces recaptured Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, on March 28. Ongoing Ukrainian counterattacks around Kyiv will likely disrupt ongoing Russian efforts to reconstitute forces and resume major offensive operations to encircle Kyiv. Ukrainian forces additionally repelled Russian attacks toward Brovary, east of Kyiv, in the past 24 hours. Russian forces in northeastern Ukraine remain stalled and did not conduct offensive operations against Chernihiv, Sumy, or Kharkiv in the past 24 hours. Russian forces continue to make grinding progress in Mariupol but were unable to secure territory in either Donbas or toward Mykolayiv.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces have not abandoned their objective to encircle and capture Kyiv, despite Kremlin claims that Russian forces will concentrate on eastern Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recaptured the Kyiv suburb of Irpin on March 28. Ukrainian forces will likely seek to take advantage of ongoing Russian force rotations to retake further territory northwest of Kyiv in the coming days.
- Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks toward Brovary and did not conduct offensive operations toward Chernihiv, Sumy, and Kharkiv. Russian operations in northeastern Ukraine remain stalled.
- The Ukrainian General Staff stated that a battalion tactical group (BTG) of the 1st Guards Tank Army fully withdrew from Ukrainian territory near Sumy back to Russia for possible redeployment – the first Ukrainian report of a Russian unit fully withdrawing into Russia for redeployment to another axis of advance in this conflict.
- Russian forces continued to steadily take territory in Mariupol.
- Ukrainian resistance around Kherson continues to tie down Russian forces in the area. Russian forces did not conduct any offensive operations in the southern direction.

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 27

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark
 March 27, 4:30 pm ET

Russian forces have not abandoned efforts to reconstitute forces northwest of Kyiv to resume major offensive operations, and the commander of Russia's Eastern Military District (EMD) may be personally commanding the operations. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russia's 35th Combined Arms Army is rotating damaged units into Belarus and that Russian forces established a command post for all EMD forces operating around Kyiv in the Chernobyl area. Ongoing Russian efforts to replace combat losses in EMD units and deploy additional reinforcements forward are unlikely to enable Russia to successfully resume major operations around Kyiv in the near future. The increasingly static nature of the fighting around Kyiv reflects the incapacity of Russian forces rather than any shift in Russian objectives or efforts at this time.

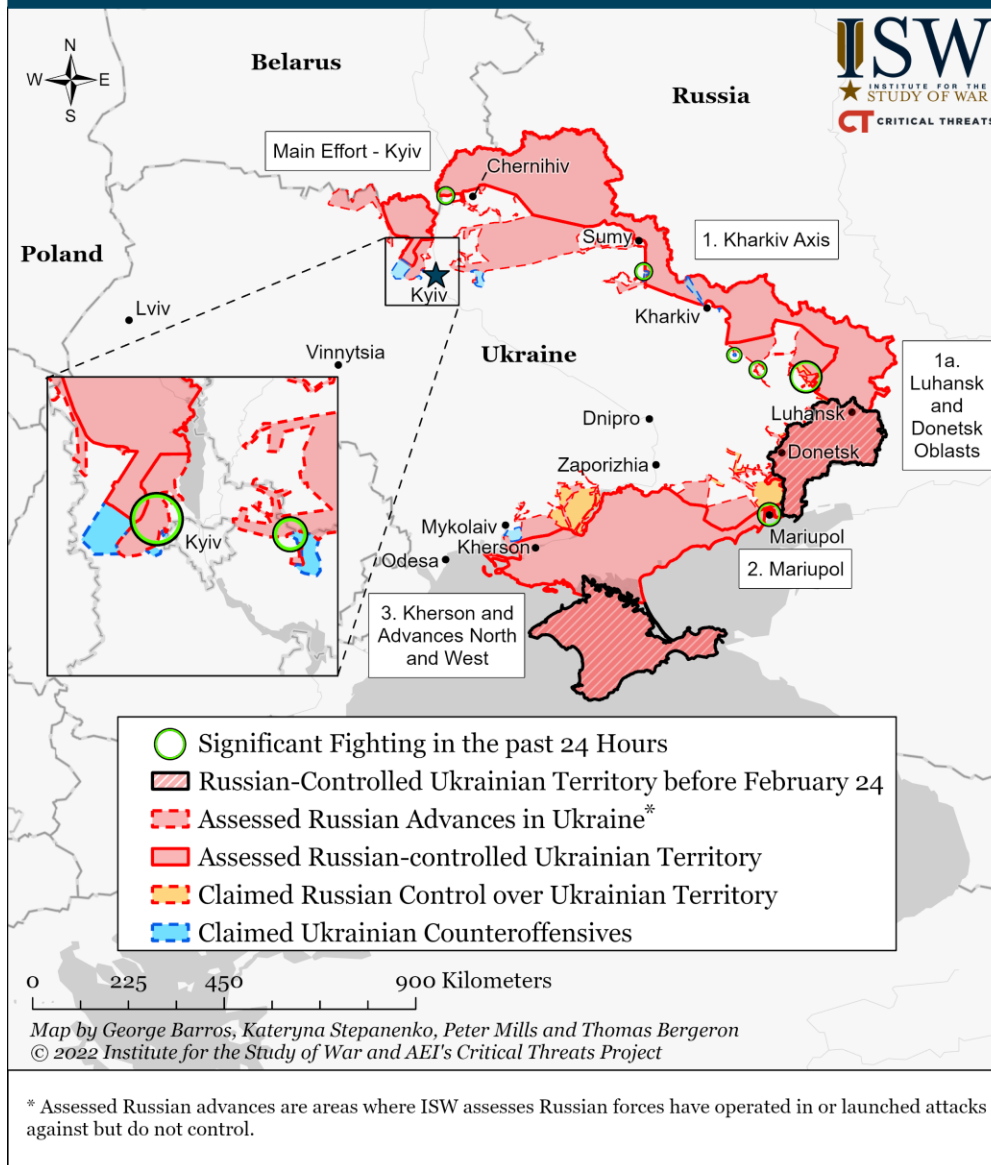
Ukrainian forces continued to conduct limited counterattacks in several locations, recapturing territory east of Kyiv, in Sumy Oblast, and around Kharkiv in the past 24 hours. Ukrainian counterattacks are likely enabling Ukrainian forces to recapture key terrain and disrupt Russian efforts to resume major offensive operations. Likely escalating Russian partisan operations around Kherson are additionally tying down Russian forces. Russian forces continue to make slow but steady progress in Mariupol, but Russian assaults largely failed elsewhere in the past 24 hours.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian Eastern Military District (EMD) Commander Colonel-General Alexander Chayko may be personally commanding efforts to regroup Russian forces in Belarus and resume operations to encircle Kyiv from the west. The Kremlin is highly unlikely to have abandoned its efforts to encircle Kyiv but will likely be unable to cohere the combat power necessary to resume major offensive operations in the near future.**
- **Neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces conducted major operations northwest of Kyiv in the last 24 hours.**
- **Ukrainian forces counterattacking east of Brovary since March 24 successfully retook territory late on March 26.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted limited counterattacks in Sumy Oblast on March 26-27.**
- **Fighting continued around Izyum in the past 24 hours, with little territory changing hands.**
- **Russian forces continued steady advances in Mariupol.**
- **Ukrainian partisans around Kherson continue to tie down Rosgvardia units in the region, likely hindering Russian capabilities to resume offensive operations in the southern direction.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 27, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 26](#) [Click here to read the full report.](#)

Fredrick W. Kagan, and George Barros
March 26, 3:00 pm ET

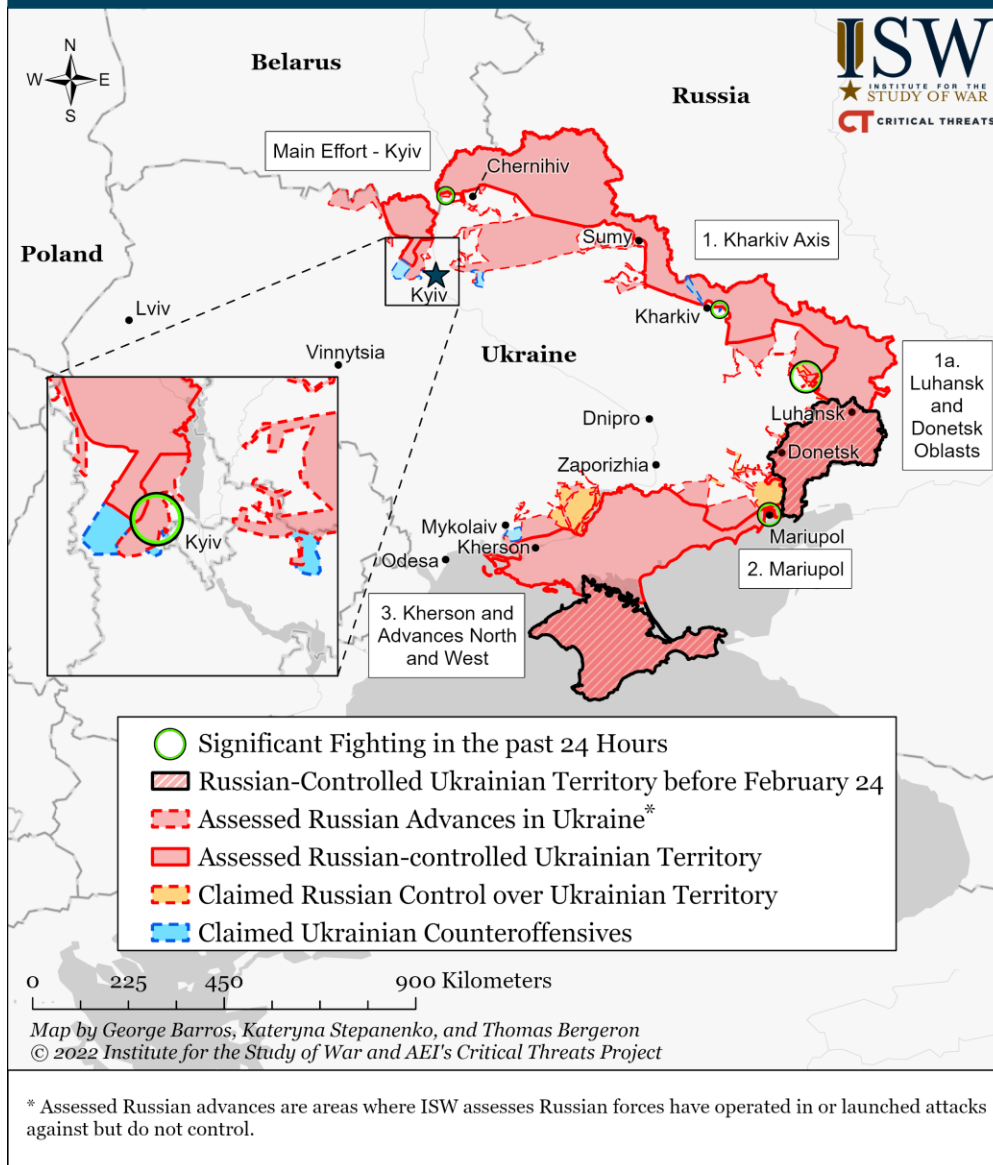
Russian forces continued their unsuccessful efforts to move into positions from which to attack or encircle Kyiv, claims by First Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff Sergei Rudskoi on

March 25 notwithstanding. The Russian military continues to concentrate replacements and reinforcements in Belarus and Russia north of Kyiv, to fight for positions on Kyiv's outskirts, and to attempt to complete the encirclement and reduction of Chernihiv. Russian activities around Kyiv show no change in the Russian high command's prioritization of the fight around Ukraine's capital, which continues to occupy the largest single concentration of Russian ground forces in Ukraine. The Russians have not claimed to redeploy forces from Kyiv or any other part of Ukraine to concentrate on fighting in Donbas, and we have observed numerous indicators that they have not done so. The increasingly static nature of the fighting around Kyiv reflects the incapacity of Russian forces rather than any shift in Russian objectives or efforts at this time.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces continue their unsuccessful efforts to secure positions from which to attack and seize Kyiv despite the supposed reframing of the Russian military's priorities by First Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff Sergei Rudskoi on March 25.
- The Russians will likely make important progress in seizing the city of Mariupol in the coming days and will probably take the city in the near future. The scale of Russian losses in the fight for Mariupol will determine whether the city's fall will permit Russia to renew large-scale combat operations in eastern Ukraine. It is too soon to tell, but current indicators suggest that Russian losses have been and will continue to be high.
- The Ukrainian General Staff continues to report on challenges Russia faces in finding both troops and equipment to continue the war. The General Staff reports generally match observed patterns and indicators within the Ukrainian battlespace and are likely largely accurate, although we have little independent verification of their details.
- The captured city of Kherson appears to be resisting Russian control in ways that are driving the Russian military and national guard to concentrate forces on securing it. The requirement to secure captured cities can impose a significant cost on over-stretched Russian forces and hinder their ability to conduct offensive operations.
[Click here to expand map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 26, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 25

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, Fredrick W. Kagan, and George Barros
March 25, 5:00 pm ET

The Russian General Staff issued a fictitious report on the first month of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on March 25 claiming Russia's primary objective is to capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Sergei Rudskoi, first deputy chief of the Russian General Staff, gave a briefing to Russian press summing up the first month of the Russian invasion on March 25.[1] Rudskoi inaccurately claimed Russian forces have completed "the main tasks of the first stage of the operation," falsely asserting that Russia has heavily degraded the Ukrainian military, enabling Russia to focus on the "main goal" of capturing Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

Rudskoi's comments were likely aimed mainly at a domestic Russian audience and do not accurately or completely capture current Russian war aims and planned operations. Russia's justification for the invasion of Ukraine from the outset was the fictitious threat Moscow claimed Ukrainian forces posed to the people in Russian-occupied Donbas. The Kremlin has reiterated this justification for the war frequently as part of efforts to explain the invasion to its people and build or sustain public support for Putin and the war. Rudskoi's framing of the capture of the rest of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as the "main goal" of the operation is in line with this ongoing information operation.

Rudskoi's assertion that securing the unoccupied portions of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts was always the main objective of Russia's invasion is false. The Kremlin's initial campaign aimed to conduct airborne and mechanized operations to seize Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and other major Ukrainian cities to force a change of government in Ukraine.[2] Rudskoi's comments could indicate that Russia has scaled back its aims and would now be satisfied with controlling the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, but that reading is likely inaccurate. Russian forces elsewhere in Ukraine have not stopped fighting and have not entirely stopped attempting to advance and seize more territory. They are also attacking and destroying Ukrainian towns and cities, conducting operations and committing war crimes that do not accord with the objectives Rudskoi claims Russia is pursuing.

Russia continues efforts to rebuild combat power and commit it to the fight to encircle and/or assault Kyiv and take Mariupol and other targets, despite repeated failures and setbacks and continuing Ukrainian counter-attacks. The Ukrainian General Staff reports that the Russian military is building "consolidated units," likely comprised of individuals or small units drawn from a number of different battalions, brigades, and regiments, to replace combat losses and deploying them on the west bank of the Dnipro near the Chernobyl exclusion zone, among other locations. Russian forces continue their grinding and likely costly advance in Mariupol as well.

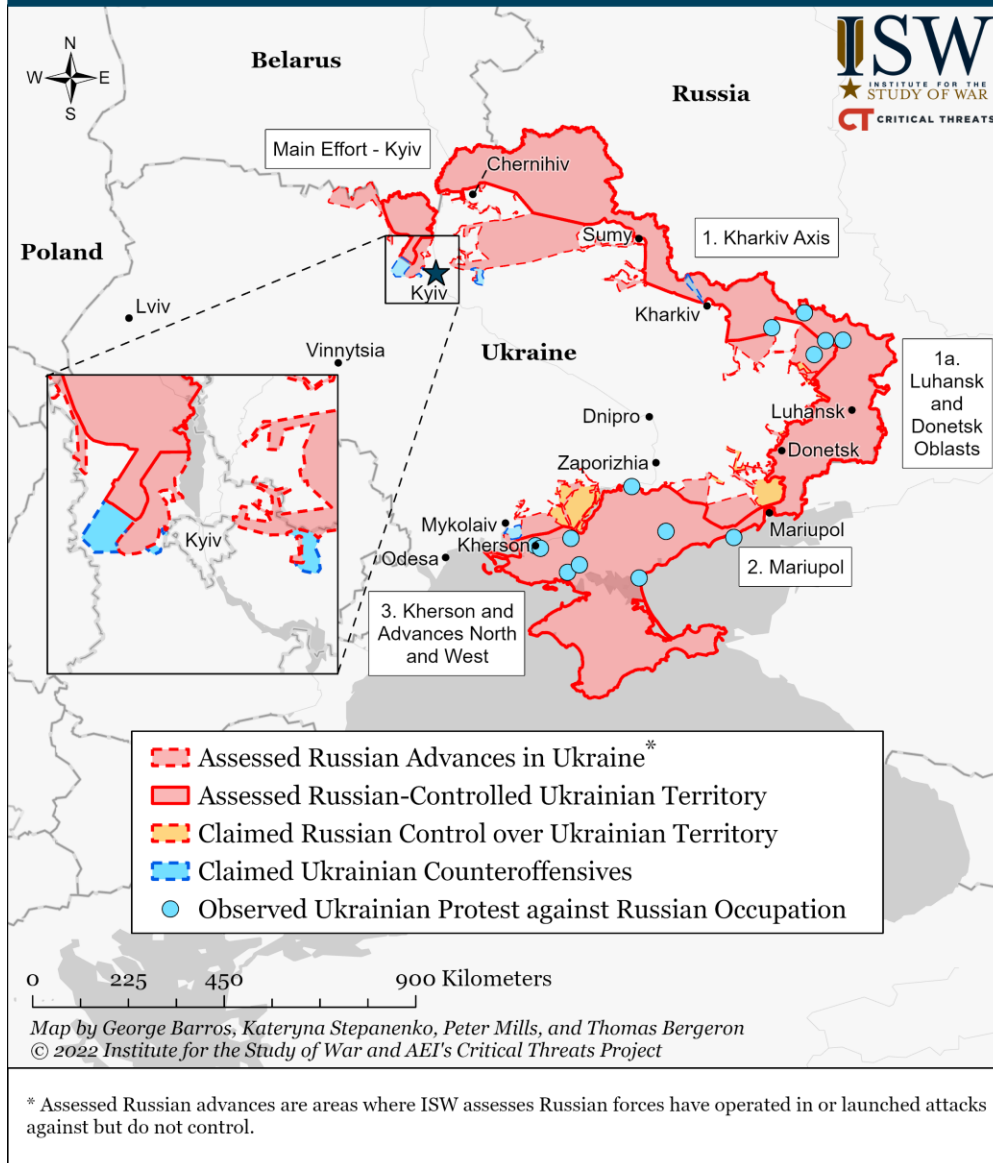
The absence of significant Russian offensive operations throughout most of Ukraine likely reflects the inability of the Russian military to generate sufficient combat power to attack rather than any decision in Moscow to change Russia's war aims or concentrate on the east. Rudskoi's comments are likely an attempt to gloss the Russian military's failures for a domestic audience and focus attention on the only part of the theater in which Russian troops are making any progress at this point. **The West should not over-read this obvious messaging embedded in a piece of propaganda that continued very few true statements.**

Key Takeaways

- **The Russian General Staff is attempting to adjust the war's narrative so make it appear that Russia is achieving its aims and choosing to restrict operations when in fact it is not achieving its objectives and is being forced to abandon large-scale offensive operations because of its own failures and losses as well as continuing skillful Ukrainian resistance.**
- **Ukrainian forces claimed to kill the commander of Russia's 49th Combined Arms Army, operating around Kherson.**
- **Ukrainian counterattacks northwest of Kyiv made further minor progress in the past 24 hours.**
- **Ukrainian forces additionally conducted a successful counterattack east of Kyiv in the past 24 hours, pushing Russian forces east from Brovary.**
- **Russian attempts to encircle Chernihiv remain unsuccessful.**
- **The military situation in northeastern Ukraine did not change in the past 24 hours.**
- **Russian forces continue to take Mariupol street-by-street and have entered the city center.**
- **Russian forces did not conduct any offensive operations around Kherson in the past 24 hours.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 25, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Ukraine Conflict Update 19

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

March 25

The ISW Russia team's Ukraine Conflict Update is a semi-weekly synthetic product covering key political and rhetorical events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. This update covers events from March 22-24. All of Russia's team's coverage of the war in Ukraine—including daily military assessments and maps, past Conflict Updates, and several supplemental assessments—are available on our [Ukraine Crisis Coverage](#) landing page.

Key Takeaways March 22-24

- **Kyiv remains firm that Russia must return Crimea and Donbas to Ukraine, despite Kremlin claims that Zelensky is willing to discuss recognizing Russian control over these temporarily occupied territories.**
- **The Kremlin increased its rhetoric accusing the West of posing an existential threat to Russia and refusing to rule out the use of nuclear weapons in the event of threats to Russia to deter the West from further supporting Ukraine.**
- **Western leaders continued to sound alarms about potential Russian chemical or biological attacks in Ukraine.**
- **The Kremlin continues to undercount Russian deaths in Ukraine, which have likely passed 10,000 dead since February 24.**
- **Western sanctions are successfully disrupting Russia's military industry and energy exports.**
- **Russian forces are likely forcibly relocating Ukrainian citizens to Russia to establish control over occupied areas and gain political leverage.**
- **The EU and NATO announced both short- and long-term plans to increase military defense spending, troop deployments to Eastern Europe, and military assistance for Ukraine.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 24

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 24, 6:30 pm ET

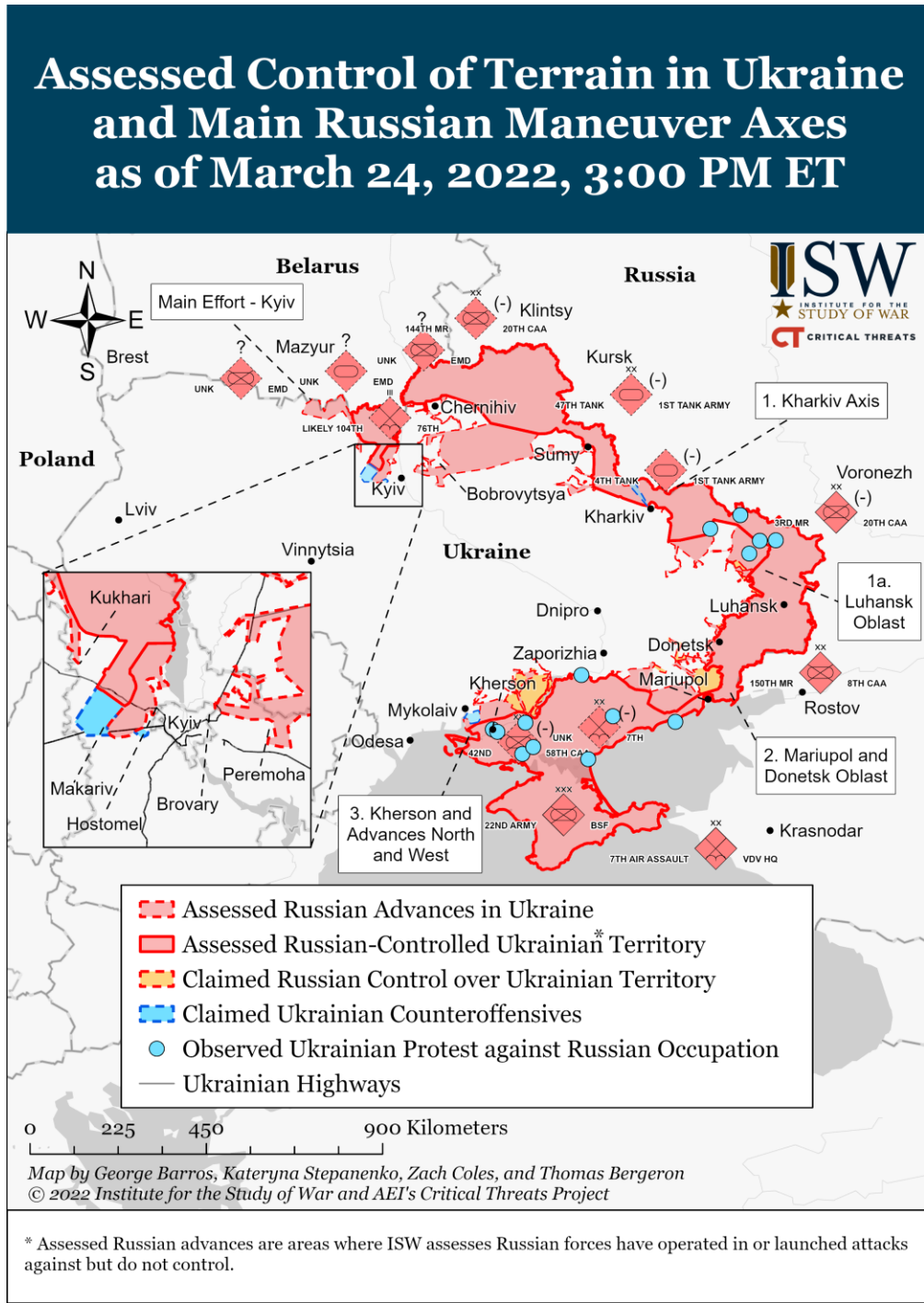
Russian forces continue to make slow but steady progress in Mariupol, entering the city center on March 24, but conducted few offensive operations elsewhere in the country. Ukrainian counterattacks northwest of Kyiv in the past several days continue to relieve pressure on the city and Russian forces continued to dig in. Ukrainian forces repelled limited Russian attacks northeast of the city and around Kharkiv.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces entered central Mariupol on March 24 and continued to take ground across the city. Local Ukrainian authorities left the city in order to better coordinate regional operations amid the deteriorating situation in Mariupol itself.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted a successful attack on Russian ships docked at the occupied port of Berdyansk, likely sinking a landing ship and damaging or sinking another. Ukraine's demonstrated ability to inflict serious damage on Berdyansk may disrupt Russian forces from renewing attempts to reinforce operations in Mariupol and around Kherson by sea.**
- **Ukrainian forces did not retake any territory in continuing counterattacks northwest of Kyiv but forced Russian troops onto the defensive.**

- Ukrainian forces repelled renewed Russian attempts to advance toward Brovary from the northeast and complete the encirclement of Chernihiv.
- Russian forces continue to shell Kharkiv and struck a humanitarian aid delivery point, killing six and wounding 15.
- Russian forces secured several minor advances in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in the last 24 hours.

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 23

Click here to read the full report.

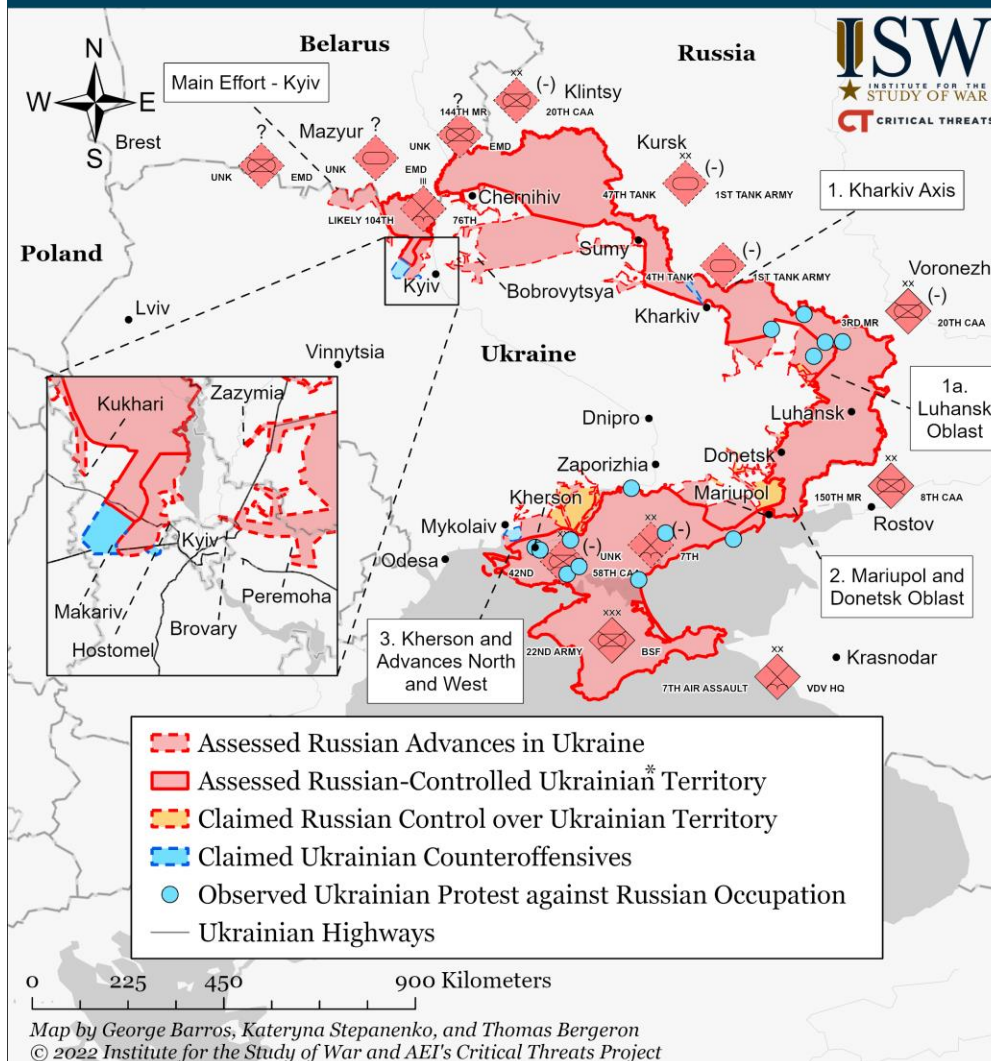
Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko
March 23, 5:00pm ET

Russian forces continued to settle in for a protracted and stalemated conflict over the last 24 hours, with more reports emerging of Russian troops digging in and laying mines—indications that they have gone over to the defensive. Ukrainian forces continued to conduct limited and effective counterattacks to relieve pressure on Kyiv, although the extent of those counterattacks is likely less than what some Ukrainian officials are claiming. Russian efforts to mobilize additional forces to keep their offensive moving continue to be halting and limited. Russian progress in taking Mariupol city remains slow and grinding. Increasing Russian emphasis on using air, artillery, and rocket/missile bombardments of Ukrainian cities to offset forward offensive momentum raises the urgency of providing Ukraine with systems to defend against these attacks.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continue to go over to the defensive, conducting restricted and localized ground attacks that make little progress.**
- **Ukrainian forces are conducting limited and successful counterattacks around Kyiv to disrupt Russian operations to encircle the city (which has now become extremely unlikely) and relieve the pressure on the capital.**
- **The Battle of Mariupol continues as a block-by-block struggle with fierce Ukrainian resistance and limited Russian gains.**
- **Russia is likely struggling to obtain fresh combat power from Syria and elsewhere rapidly.**
[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: We have updated our map to show expanded Russian areas of controlled terrain and advances around Luhansk based on observing new data. The expanded areas of assessed Russian control in our map of March 23 do not indicate that the Russians have made further gains, only that we have received sufficiently detailed and reliable reporting of previous gains to adjust our map.

We have updated our map considerably since yesterday to show our current assessment of the probable front line west of Kyiv. Some of the Ukrainian gains shown likely occurred on March 21, but we have only just acquired sufficient evidence and clarity on the Ukrainian operations to reflect them accurately in the map of March 23.

Russia Campaign Assessment March 22

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 22, 6:00 pm ET

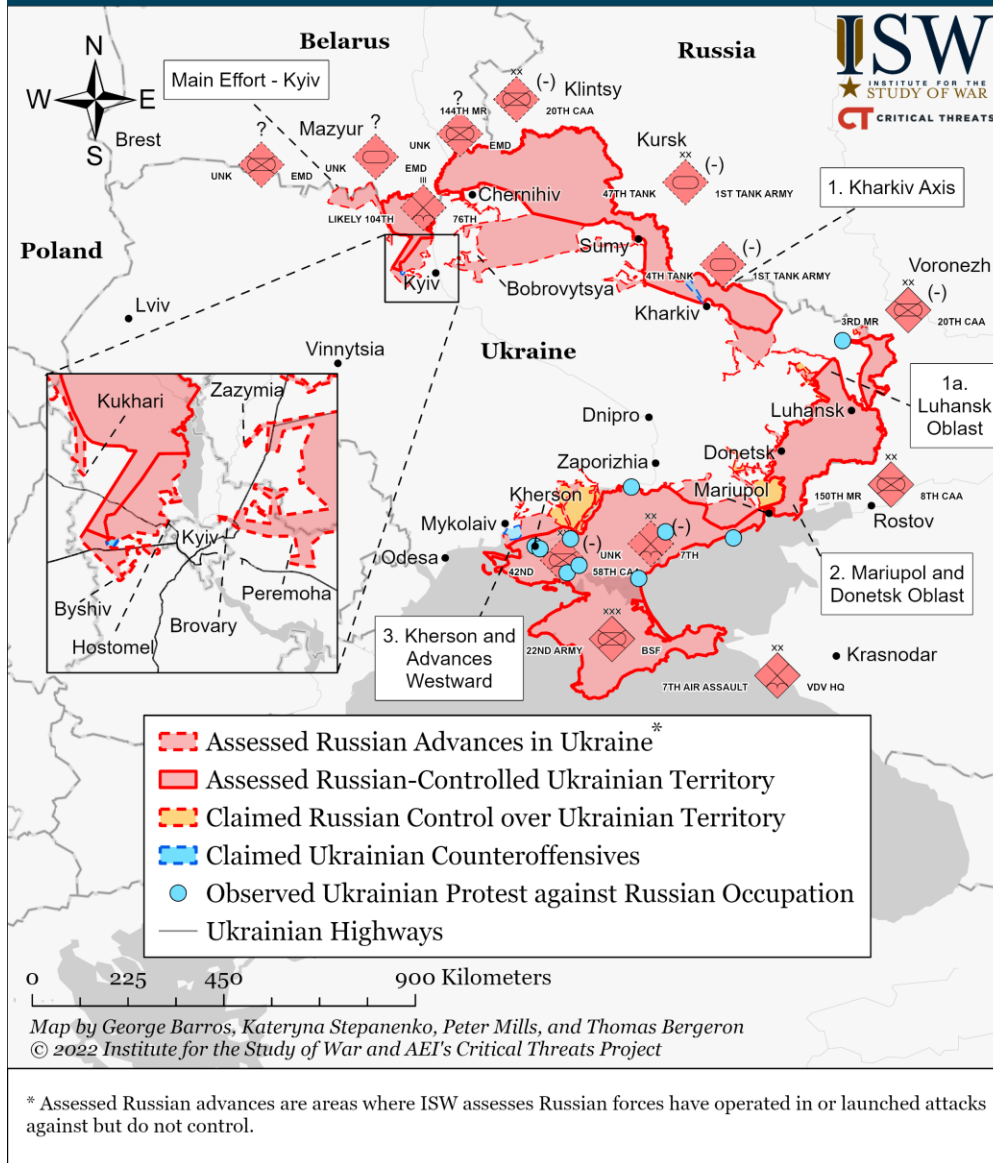
Russian forces did not make any major advances on March 22 and Ukrainian forces conducted local counterattacks northwest of Kyiv and around Mykolayiv. Russian forces around Kyiv and other major cities are increasingly prioritizing long-range bombardment after the failure of Russian ground offensives but are unlikely to force major cities to surrender in this manner. Russian forces did not conduct any offensive operations toward the northeastern Ukrainian cities of Chernihiv, Sumy, or Kharkiv in the last 24 hours. Russian forces continued to further reduce the Mariupol pocket.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are likely moving to a phase of protracted bombardment of Ukrainian cities due to the failure of Russia's initial campaign to encircle and seize Kyiv and other major cities.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted successful localized counterattacks northwest of Kyiv.**
- **Russian forces in northeastern Ukraine did not conduct any offensive operations in the past 24 hours.**
- **Ukrainian forces repelled several Russian assaults in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in the past 24 hours.**
- **Russian forces continue to make slow but steady progress reducing the Mariupol pocket.**
- **Russia may have failed to appoint an overall commander for its invasion of Ukraine, leading to Russian axes of advance competing for limited supplies and failing to synchronize their operations.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 22, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



What Stalemate Means in Ukraine and Why it Matters

[Click here to read the full article.](#)

By Frederick W. Kagan

The initial Russian campaign to invade and conquer Ukraine is culminating without achieving its objectives—it is being defeated, in other words. The war is settling into a stalemate condition in much of the theater. But the war isn't over and isn't likely to end soon. Nor is the outcome of the war yet clear. The

Russians might still win; the Ukrainians might win; the war might expand to involve other countries; or it might turn into a larger scale version of the stalemate in Ukraine's east that had persisted from 2014 to the start of Russia's invasion in February 2022. The failure of Russia's initial military campaign nevertheless marks an important inflection that has implications for the development and execution of Western military, economic, and political strategies. The West must continue supplying Ukraine with the weapons it needs to fight, but it must now also expand its aid dramatically to help keep Ukraine alive as a country even in conditions of stalemate.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 21

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 21, 5:30pm ET

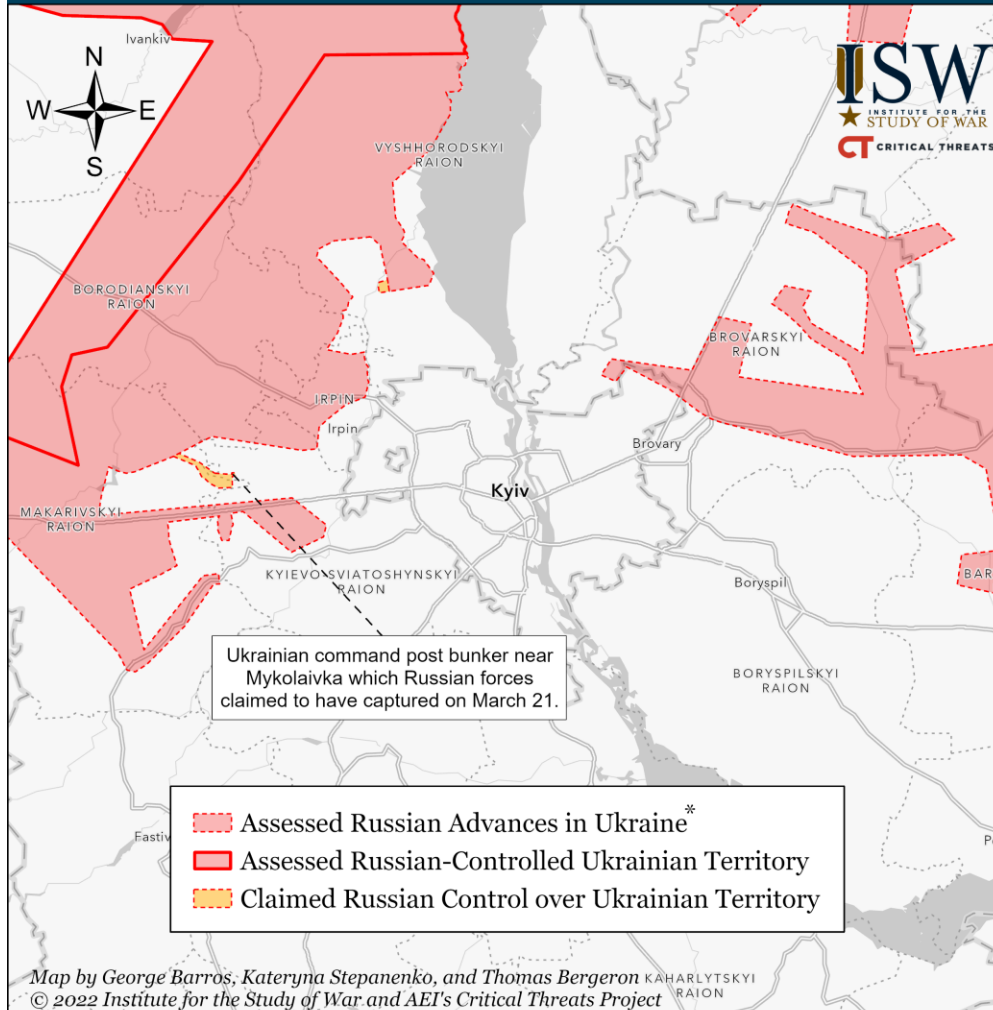
Russian forces did not make any major advances on March 21. Russian forces northwest and northeast of Kyiv continued to shell the city and strengthen defensive positions but did not conduct major offensive operations. Russian forces did not conduct any offensive operations toward the northeastern Ukrainian cities of Chernihiv, Sumy, or Kharkiv in the last 24 hours. Russian forces continued to reduce the Mariupol pocket and conducted several unsuccessful assaults in Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts but did not launch any offensive operations around Kherson.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces did not conduct any offensive operations northwest of Kyiv and further reinforced their defensive positions.**
- **Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in northeastern Ukraine and have been unable to solve logistics issues.**
- **Russian forces continued to make slow but steady progress and shell civilian infrastructure in Mariupol.**
- **Russian and proxy forces conducted several unsuccessful assaults in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in the past 24 hours.**
- **Russia continues to deploy low-quality reserves, including combat-support elements and low-readiness units from the Eastern Military District, to replace losses in frontline units.**
- **The Ukrainian General Staff warned that Russia seeks to conduct a provocation to bring Belarus into the war, but a Belarusian offensive into western Ukraine remains unlikely to occur or succeed if it did.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kyiv as of March 21, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian efforts to encircle or seize Kyiv remain stalemated as of March 21. Ukrainian defenses and counter-attacks have badly disrupted the Russian advances on the east bank of the Dnipro. The Russians will not likely be able to restart major attacks on that axis for some time. The Russians have brought up reinforcements and supplies on the west bank, where they are establishing defensible lines. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed it captured the Ukrainian command post bunker in Mykolaivka, approximately 35 kilometers from Kyiv City, on March 21. ISW cannot verify this claim at this time. The Russians are concentrating artillery and rocket-launchers to increase their bombardment of the city, possibly as an alternative to renewed major offensive operations.

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 20

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 20, 4:00pm ET

Russian forces did not make any major advances on March 20. Russian forces around Kyiv are increasingly establishing defensive positions and preparing to deploy further artillery and fire control assets. Ukrainian forces repelled continuing Russian efforts to seize the city of Izyum, southeast of Kharkiv, and Russian forces did not conduct any other offensive operations in northeast Ukraine. Russian forces continue to make slow but steady progress on Luhansk Oblast and around Mariupol, but did not conduct any offensive operations towards Mykolayiv or Kryvyi Rih.

Key Takeaways

- The Ukrainian General Staff reported for the first time that the Kremlin is preparing its population for a “long war” in Ukraine and implementing increasingly draconian mobilization measures, including deploying youth military organization members aged 17–18.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly killed three Russian regimental commanders in the last 24 hours.
- Russia’s Wagner Group will likely facilitate the deployment of Libyan fighters to Ukraine.
- Russian forces are digging in to positions around Kyiv, including the first reports of the war of Russian forces deploying minefields.
- Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault on Izyum, southeast of Kharkiv, and inflicted heavy casualties.
- Russian forces continued their slow advance into Mariupol but did not achieve any major territorial gains.
- Ukrainian forces launched further localized counterattacks around Mykolayiv.

[Click here to enlarge the image](#)

Map of Ukraine: Russian Advances and Controlled Territory (March 2022)

Legend:

- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Assessed Russian-Controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Observed Ukrainian Protest against Russian Occupation
- Ukrainian Highways

Scale: 0 to 900 Kilometers

Map by: George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Thomas Bergeron
 © 2022 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 19

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 19, 3 pm ET

Ukrainian forces have defeated the initial Russian campaign of this war. That campaign aimed to conduct airborne and mechanized operations to seize Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and other major Ukrainian cities to force a change of government in Ukraine. That campaign has culminated. Russian forces continue to make limited advances in some parts of the theater but are very unlikely to be able to seize their objectives in this way. The doctrinally sound Russian response to this situation would be to end this campaign, accept a possibly lengthy operational pause, develop the plan for a new campaign, build up resources for that new campaign, and launch it when the resources and other conditions are ready. The Russian military has not yet adopted this approach. It is instead continuing to feed small collections of reinforcements into an ongoing effort to keep the current campaign alive. We assess that that effort will fail.

The ultimate fall of Mariupol is increasingly unlikely to free up enough Russian combat power to change the outcome of the initial campaign dramatically. Russian forces concentrated considerable combat power around Mariupol drawn from the 8th Combined Arms Army to the east and from the group of Russian forces in Crimea to the west. Had the Russians taken Mariupol quickly or with relatively few losses they would likely have been able to move enough combat power west toward Zaporizhiya and Dnipro to threaten those cities. The protracted siege of Mariupol is seriously weakening Russian forces on that axis, however. The confirmed death of the commander of the Russian 150th Motorized Rifle Division likely indicates the scale of the damage Ukrainian defenders are inflicting on those formations. The block-by-block fighting in Mariupol itself is costing the Russian military time, initiative, and combat power. If and when Mariupol ultimately falls the Russian forces now besieging it may not be strong enough to change the course of the campaign dramatically by attacking to the west.

Russian forces in the south appear to be focusing on a drive toward Kryvyi Rih, presumably to isolate and then take Zaporizhiya and Dnipro from the west but are unlikely to secure any of those cities in the coming weeks if at all. Kryvyi Rih is a city of more than 600,000 and heavily fortified according to the head of its military administration. Zaporizhiya and Dnipro are also large. The Russian military has been struggling to take Mariupol, smaller than any of them, since the start of the war with more combat power than it is currently pushing toward Kryvyi Rih. The Russian advance on that axis is thus likely to bog down as all other Russian advances on major cities have done.

The Russian military continues to commit small groups of reinforcements to localized fighting rather than concentrating them to launch new large-scale operations. Russia continues to commit units drawn from its naval infantry from all fleets, likely because those units are relatively more combat-ready than rank-and-file Russian regiments and brigades. The naval infantry belonging to the Black Sea Fleet is likely the largest single pool of ready reserve forces the Russian military has not yet committed. Much of that naval infantry has likely been embarked on amphibious landing ships off the Odesa coast since early in the war, presumably ready to land near Odesa as soon as Russian forces from Crimea secured a reliable ground line of communication (GLOC) from Crimea to Odesa. The likelihood that

Russian forces from Crimea will establish such a GLOC in the near future is becoming remote, however, and the Russian military has apparently begun using elements of the Black Sea Fleet naval infantry to reinforce efforts to take Mariupol.

The culmination of the initial Russian campaign is creating conditions of stalemate throughout most of Ukraine. Russian forces are digging in around the periphery of Kyiv and elsewhere, attempting to consolidate political control over areas they currently occupy, resupplying and attempting to reinforce units in static positions, and generally beginning to set conditions to hold in approximately their current forward positions for an indefinite time. Maxar imagery of Russian forces digging trenches and revetments in Kyiv Oblast over the past several days supports this assessment.^[1] Comments by Duma members about forcing Ukraine to surrender by exhaustion in May could reflect a revised Russian approach to ending this conflict on terms favorable to Moscow.

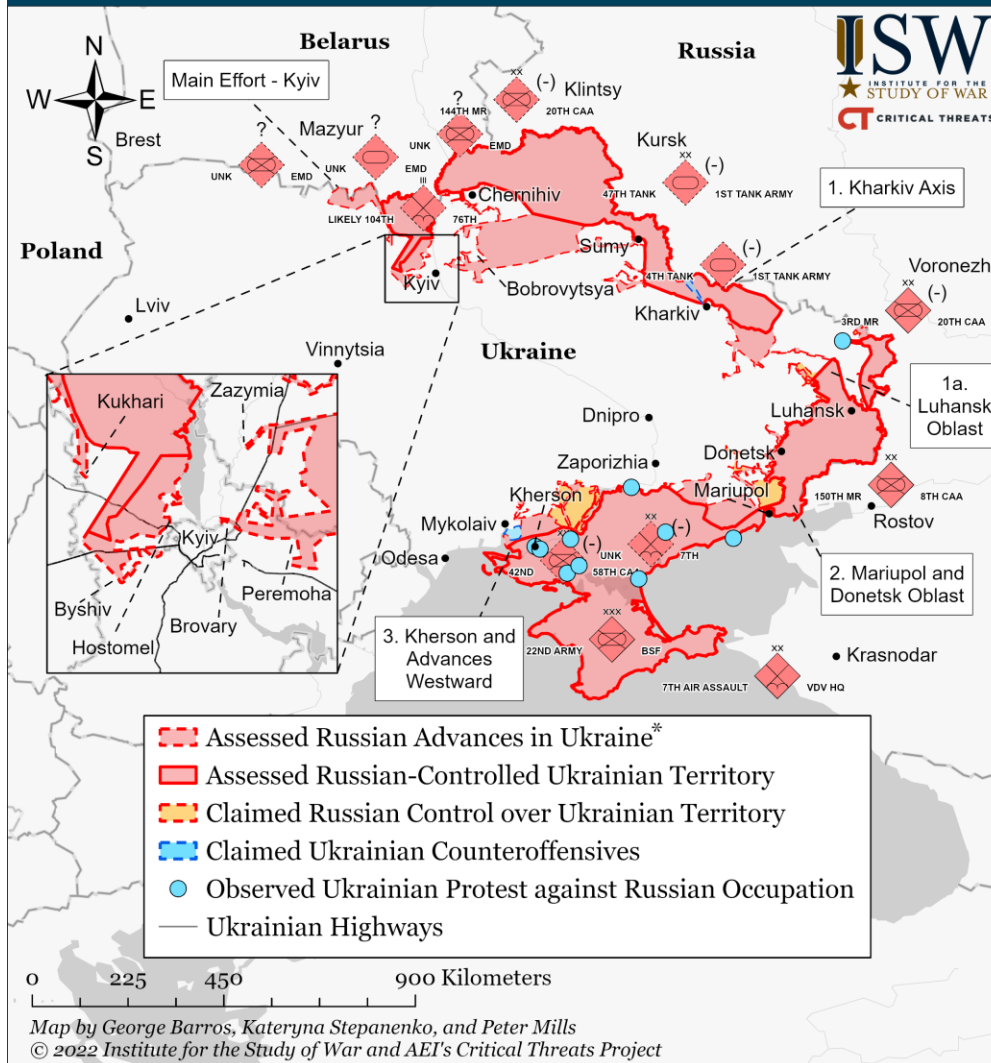
Stalemate will likely be very violent and bloody, especially if it protracts. Stalemate is not armistice or ceasefire. It is a condition in war in which each side conducts offensive operations that do not fundamentally alter the situation. Those operations can be very damaging and cause enormous casualties. The World War I battles of the Somme, Verdun, and Passchendaele were all fought in conditions of stalemate and did not break the stalemate. **If the war in Ukraine settles into a stalemate condition Russian forces will continue to bomb and bombard Ukrainian cities, devastating them and killing civilians, even as Ukrainian forces impose losses on Russian attackers and conduct counter-attacks of their own.** The Russians could hope to break Ukrainians' will to continue fighting under such circumstances by demonstrating Kyiv's inability to expel Russian forces or stop their attacks even if the Russians are demonstrably unable to take Ukraine's cities. Ukraine's defeat of the initial Russian campaign may therefore set conditions for a devastating protraction of the conflict and a dangerous new period testing the resolve of Ukraine and the West. Continued and expanded Western support to Ukraine will be vital to seeing Ukraine through that new period.

Key Takeaways:

- We now assess that the initial Russian campaign to seize Ukraine's capital and major cities and force regime change has failed;
- Russian forces continue efforts to restore momentum to this culminated campaign, but those efforts will likely also fail;
- Russian troops will continue trying to advance to within effective artillery range of the center of Kyiv, but prospects for their success are unclear;
- The war will likely descend into a phase of bloody stalemate that could last for weeks or months;
- Russia will expand efforts to bombard Ukrainian civilians in order to break Ukrainians' will to continue fighting (at which the Russians will likely fail);
- The most dangerous current Russian advance is from Kherson north toward Kryvyi Rih in an effort to isolate Zaporizhiya and Dnipro from the west. Russian forces are unlikely to be able to surround or take Kryvyi Rih in the coming days, and may not be able to do so at all without massing much larger forces for the effort than they now have available on that axis;
- The Russians appear to have abandoned plans to attack Odesa at least in the near term.

[Click here to enlarge the image.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 19, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: We have updated our map to show expanded Russian areas of controlled terrain and advances around Chernihiv based on more detailed reporting from the Ukrainian General Staff and other sources. The expanded areas of assessed Russian control in our map of March 19 do not indicate that the Russians have made further gains, only that we have received sufficiently detailed and reliable reporting of previous gains to adjust our map.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 18

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 18, 5:30pm ET

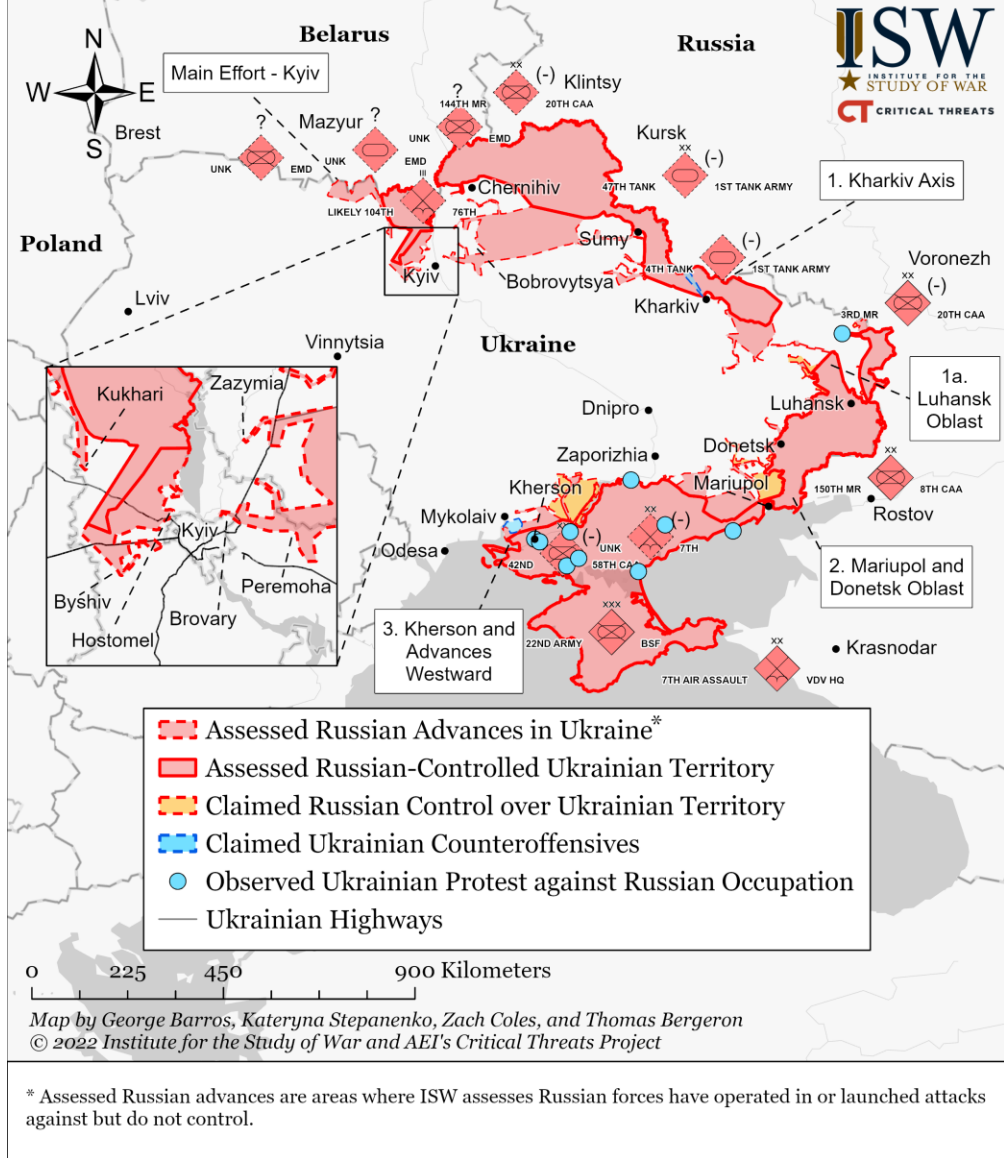
Ukrainian forces conducted a major successful counterattack around Mykolayiv in the past several days, and Russian forces continued to secure territorial gains only around Mariupol on March 18. Russian forces face growing morale and supply problems, including growing reports of self-mutilation among Russian troops to avoid deployment to Ukraine and shortages of key guided munitions. The Ukrainian General Staff continued to report on March 18 that Russia has failed to achieve its strategic objectives in Ukraine, including destroying the Ukrainian Armed Forces, capturing Kyiv, and establishing control over Ukraine to the east bank of the Dnipro River—the first time the Ukrainian General Staff included this territorial conquest as an explicit Russian objective. The Ukrainian General Staff additionally stated that Ukrainian forces “continue step by step to liberate the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine in all directions” on March 18, the first Ukrainian mention of conducting counterattacks “in all directions.”

Key Takeaways

- **The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russia has “significantly exhausted its human resources” due to battle casualties, cases of self-mutilation to avoid deployment, and psychological factors.**
- **Ukrainian forces likely conducted a successful counteroffensive against Russian forces around Mykolayiv in the past several days.**
- **The ability of Ukrainian forces to conduct a successful major counterattack indicates Russian forces attempting to encircle Mykolayiv likely overstretched, and Russian forces are unlikely to have the capability to resume offensive operations toward Odesa in the near term.**
- **Russian forces did not conduct any offensive operations northwest or northeast of Kyiv on March 18.**
- **Russian forces continue to make steady progress reducing the Mariupol pocket.**
- **Ukrainian forces halted a Russian attempt to advance southeast of Kharkiv, through the city of Izyum, in the past 24 hours. Russia is deploying additional reserves to reinforce the Kharkiv axis of advance.**
- **Russian and proxy forces made minor territorial gains north of the city of Severodonetsk in Luhansk Oblast and will likely assault the city itself in the next 24-48 hours.**
- **Ukrainian military intelligence created an official website to provide support and guidance to Ukrainian fighters and civilians in Russian-occupied territory.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 18, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Ukraine Conflict Update 17

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team
with the Critical Threats Project, AEI

March 18, 2022

ISW published its most recent [Russian campaign assessment](#) at 5:30 pm EST on March 17.

The ISW Russia team is relaunching its Ukraine Conflict Updates as a semi-weekly synthetic product covering key political and rhetorical events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. This update covers events from March 15 – March 17.

Key Takeaways March 15-17

- Russian and Ukrainian negotiators have likely agreed that Ukraine will not join NATO, but the Kremlin maintains maximalist demands of Ukraine that it is unlikely to drop in the coming weeks.
- Russian media continues to amplify government officials and “experts” who falsely claim that the United States is preparing to wage biological or chemical war on Russia.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin blamed Ukraine for allegedly developing nuclear weapons with foreign assistance and falsely claimed that Ukraine planned to conduct a nuclear attack against Russia.
- The Kremlin continued to claim that Ukraine is the aggressor and that Russia’s invasion is going according to plan and will soon accomplish its objectives.
- The Kremlin downplayed the impact of sanctions on the Russian economy and took additional steps to mitigate and counter their effects.
- Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stated on March 15 that Belarusian soldiers will not enter Ukraine and accused Ukraine of trying to drag Belarus into the war.
- The Kremlin is kidnapping local leaders to set conditions for controlling and subduing occupied Ukrainian territory.
- NATO defense ministers agreed to deploy additional troops to NATO’s eastern borders but reiterated that the Allies will not create a no-fly zone over or send troops to Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin asked China for military and economic support for the war in Ukraine. China has neither confirmed nor denied whether they will provide aid to Russia.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 17

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 17, 5:30pm ET

Russian forces did not make any major advances and Ukrainian forces carried out several local counterattacks on March 17.^[1] Russian forces made little territorial progress and continued to deploy reserve elements—including from the 1st Guards Tank Army and 810th Naval Infantry Brigade—in small force packets that are unlikely to prove decisive. Russian forces continue to suffer heavy casualties around Kharkiv, and Russian attempts to bypass the city of Izyum are unlikely to succeed. Russian forces continued assaults on Mariupol on March 17 but did not conduct any other successful advances from Crimea.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces continue to make steady territorial gains around Mariupol and are increasingly targeting residential areas of the city.
- Ukrainian forces northwest of Kyiv launched several local counterattacks and inflicted heavy damage on Russian forces.
- Ukrainian forces repelled Russian operations around Kharkiv and reported killing a regimental commander.
- Ukrainian intelligence reports that Russia may have expended nearly its entire store of precision cruise missiles in the first twenty days of its invasion.
- Russian forces deployed unspecified reserve elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army and Baltic Fleet Naval Infantry to northeastern Ukraine on March 17.

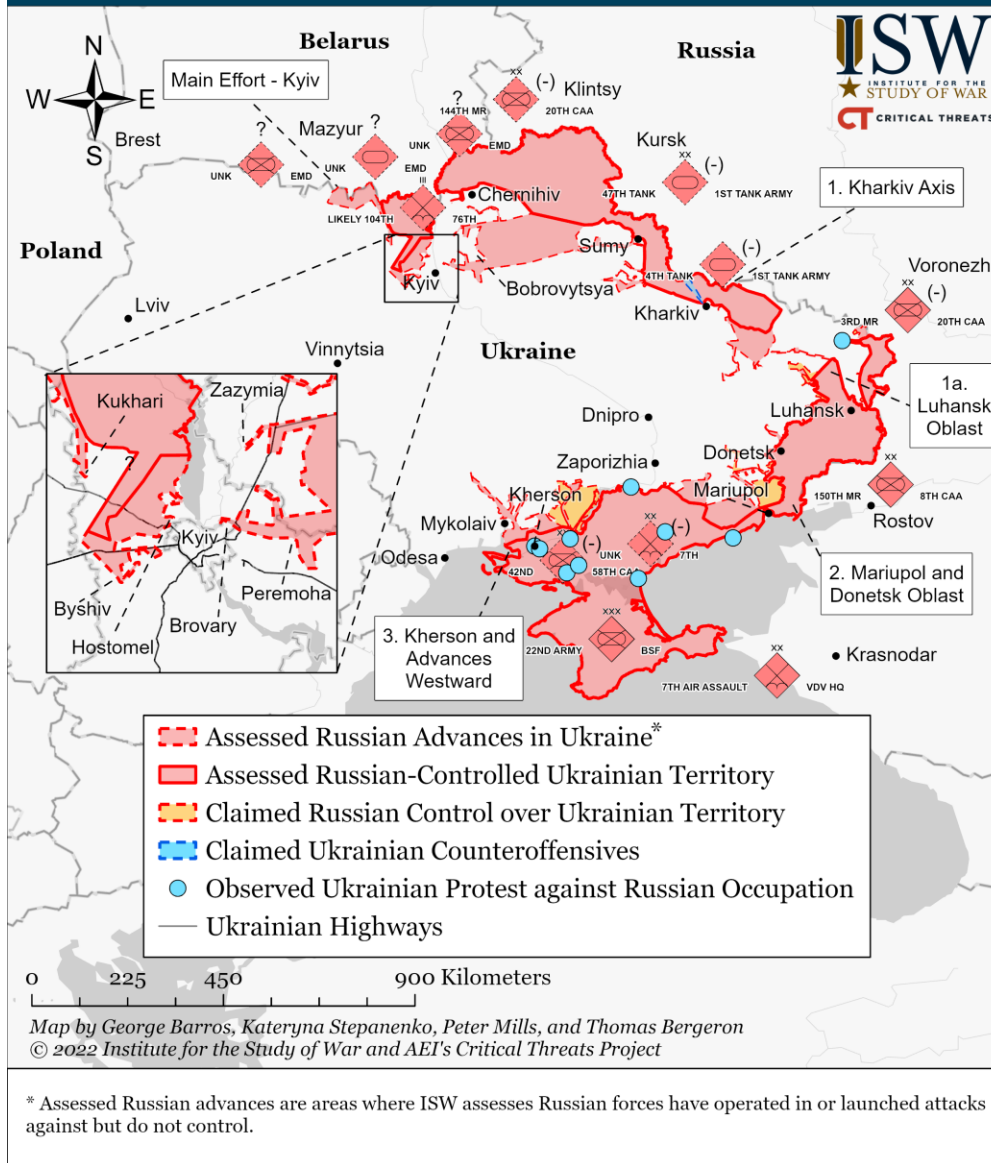
- **Russia may be parceling out elements of the reserve force that could conduct an amphibious operation along the Black Sea coast to support ongoing assaults on Mariupol, further reducing the likelihood of a Russian amphibious assault on Odesa.**
- **Ukrainian forces shot down 10 Russian aircraft—including five jets, three helicopters, and two UAVs—on March 16, and Ukrainian forces continue to successfully contest Russian air operations.**

Russian forces face mounting difficulties replacing combat casualties and replacing expended munitions. The Ukrainian General Staff stated on March 17 that Russian forces will begin another wave of mobilization for the Donetsk People's Republic's (DNR) 1st Army Corps on March 20.[2] Ukrainian intelligence continued to report Russian forces face difficulties manning both combat and support units and increasing desertion rates.[3] The General Staff further reported that Russian forces are increasingly using indiscriminate weapons against residential areas because they used almost their entire supply of "Kalibr" and "Iskander" cruise missiles in the first 20 days of the invasion.[4] It is unclear if the Ukrainian General Staff means Russian forces have used almost all precision munitions earmarked for the operation in Ukraine or almost all missiles in Russia's total arsenal—though likely the former.

The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported several details on Russian efforts to recruit Syrian mercenaries on March 17.[5] The GUR reported that the Russian military ordered its base in Hmeimim, Syria to send up to 300 fighters from Syria to Ukraine daily. The GUR additionally reported that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has promised to recruit 40,000 Syrian fighters to deploy to Ukraine. The GUR reported Russian authorities are promising Syrian recruits that they will exclusively act as police in occupied territories. Finally, the GUR reported low morale among Syrian recruits, including several cases of self-mutilation to avoid being deployed, and claimed many fighters see deploying to Russia and Belarus as an opportunity to desert and migrate to the EU.

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 17, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment March 16

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 16, 5:30pm ET

Russian forces did not make any major advances and Ukrainian forces carried out several local counterattacks on March 17.[1] Russian forces made little territorial progress and continued to deploy reserve elements—including from the 1st Guards Tank Army and 810th Naval Infantry Brigade—in small force packets that are unlikely to prove decisive. Russian forces continue to suffer heavy casualties around Kharkiv, and Russian attempts to bypass the city of Izyum are unlikely to succeed. Russian forces continued assaults on Mariupol on March 17 but did not conduct any other successful advances from Crimea.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces continue to make steady territorial gains around Mariupol and are increasingly targeting residential areas of the city.
- Ukrainian forces northwest of Kyiv launched several local counterattacks and inflicted heavy damage on Russian forces.
- Ukrainian forces repelled Russian operations around Kharkiv and reported killing a regimental commander.
- Ukrainian intelligence reports that Russia may have expended nearly its entire store of precision cruise missiles in the first twenty days of its invasion.
- Russian forces deployed unspecified reserve elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army and Baltic Fleet Naval Infantry to northeastern Ukraine on March 17.
- Russia may be parceling out elements of the reserve force that could conduct an amphibious operation along the Black Sea coast to support ongoing assaults on Mariupol, further reducing the likelihood of a Russian amphibious assault on Odesa.
- Ukrainian forces shot down 10 Russian aircraft—including five jets, three helicopters, and two UAVs—on March 16, and Ukrainian forces continue to successfully contest Russian air operations.

Russian forces face mounting difficulties replacing combat casualties and replacing expended munitions. The Ukrainian General Staff stated on March 17 that Russian forces will begin another wave of mobilization for the Donetsk People's Republic's (DNR) 1st Army Corps on March

20.[2] Ukrainian intelligence continued to report Russian forces face difficulties manning both

combat and support units and increasing desertion rates.[3] The General Staff further reported

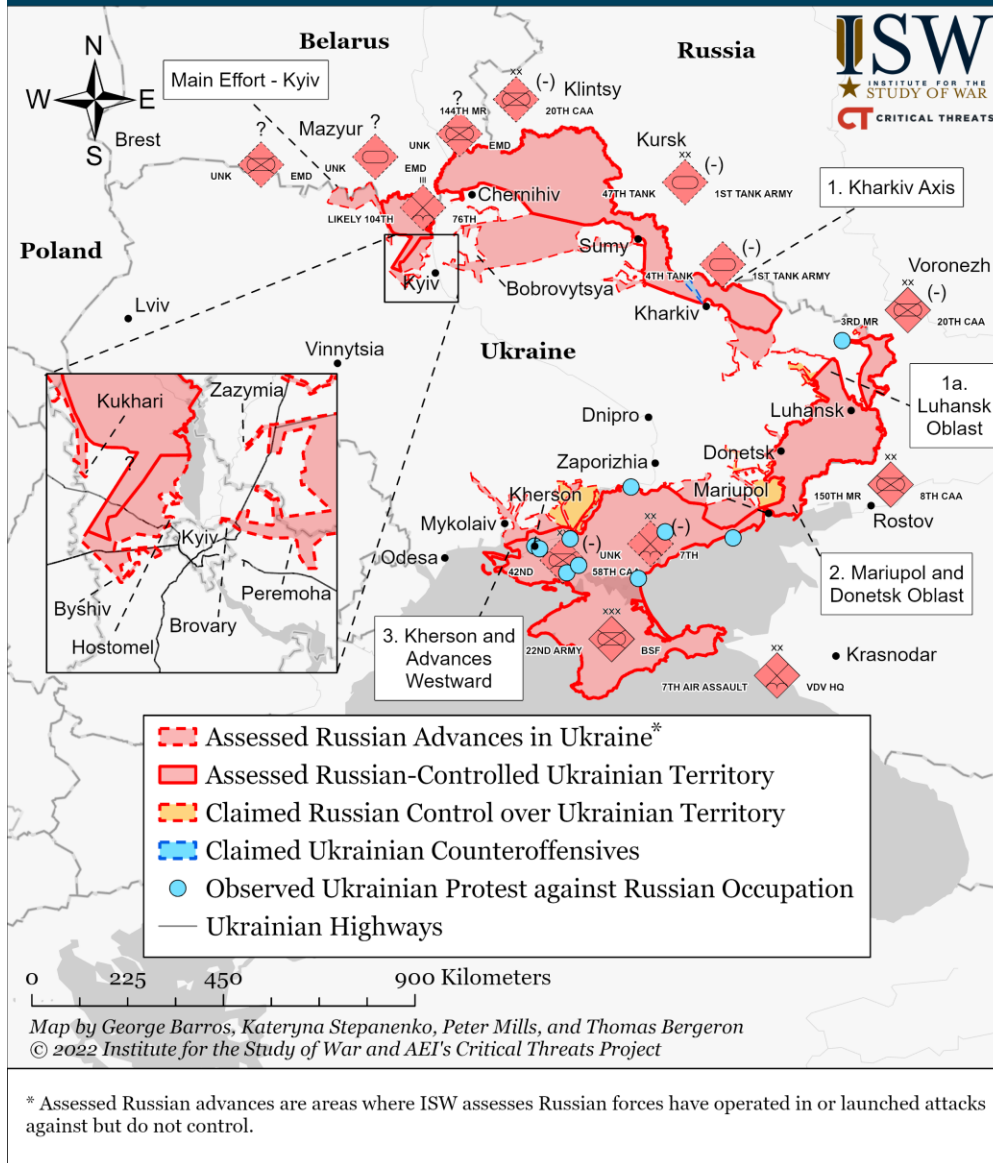
that Russian forces are increasingly using indiscriminate weapons against residential areas because they used almost their entire supply of “Kalibr” and “Iskander” cruise missiles in the first

20 days of the invasion.^[4] It is unclear if the Ukrainian General Staff means Russian forces have used almost all precision munitions earmarked for the operation in Ukraine or almost all missiles in Russia's total arsenal—though likely the former.

The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported several details on Russian efforts to recruit Syrian mercenaries on March 17.^[5] The GUR reported that the Russian military ordered its base in Hmeimim, Syria to send up to 300 fighters from Syria to Ukraine daily. The GUR additionally reported that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has promised to recruit 40,000 Syrian fighters to deploy to Ukraine. The GUR reported Russian authorities are promising Syrian recruits that they will exclusively act as police in occupied territories. Finally, the GUR reported low morale among Syrian recruits, including several cases of self-mutilation to avoid being deployed, and claimed many fighters see deploying to Russia and Belarus as an opportunity to desert and migrate to the EU.

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 17, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 15

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 15, 5:30 pm ET

Local company- and battalion-level attacks by Russian forces northwest of Kyiv on March 14-15 likely indicate the largest-scale offensive operations that Russian forces attempting to encircle Kyiv can support at this time. Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations northeast of the city, around Sumy, and only limited (and unsuccessful) attacks southeast of Kharkiv. Russian force generation efforts, including reservist and conscript call-ups and the ongoing transport of Syrian fighters to Russia and Belarus, are unable to change the balance of forces around Kyiv within the coming week. **Russian forces have not conducted simultaneous attacks along their multiple axes of advance across Ukraine since March 4 and are unlikely to do so in the next week.[1]**

Russian forces in southeastern Ukraine continue to demonstrate the greatest capabilities to date and are steadily advancing in three directions: northeast from Kherson, taking territory in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, and reducing the Ukrainian pocket in Mariupol. Russian forces are unlikely to successfully encircle Mykolayiv and threaten Odesa in the near future but retain uncommitted Naval Infantry reserves that could conduct an amphibious operation or disembark to reinforce Russian ground operations, as Russia has employed Naval Infantry elsewhere. Russia may seek to encircle Zaporizhyya by advancing northeast up the west bank of the Dnipro River after failing to break through Ukrainian forces directly south of the city on the east bank. Russian forces are making slow but steady progress against Ukrainian defenders on the line of contact in Donbas and likely seek to force them out of their prepared defensive positions.

With Russian forces likely unable to complete the encirclement of Kyiv or resume mobile offensive operations in northeastern Ukraine in the near future, the Russian capture of Mariupol will likely be the next key inflection in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russian forces have successfully encircled Mariupol and are conducting daily assaults on the western and eastern outskirts of the city. Russian air, missile, and artillery strikes continue to target residential areas and civilian infrastructure to force the city to capitulate. Russian forces have encircled the city to a depth that will likely prevent the defenders from breaking out and prevent Ukrainian efforts to relieve the defenders. Russian forces will likely be able to capture Mariupol or force it to capitulate despite strong Ukrainian defenses. The Russian capture of Mariupol will free up Russian forces, likely including large portions of the 8th Combined Arms Army, to threaten Ukrainian defenders along the line of contact in Donbas with encirclement or alternatively reinforce a Russian offensive toward Mykolayiv and Odesa. This assessment assumes that the defenders in Mariupol will run out of ammunition and/or water at some point in the relatively near future. Mariupol has been heavily fortified for years, however, and it is possible that its defenders secured sufficient supplies in advance to hold out longer. The Russians will likely continue to escalate bombardments to the point of simply destroying the city if that appears to be the case, but the reduction of Mariupol in this way could take considerably longer.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are unlikely to launch offensive operations to encircle Kyiv larger than the scattered Russian attacks observed northwest of Kyiv targeting Irpin on March 14 and Guta-Mezhyhirska on March 15 within the coming week but may launch further tactical attacks.**
- **Russian forces continued to assault Mariupol from the east and west.**
- **Russian forces did not conduct major offensive operations toward northeastern Kyiv in the past 24 hours.**
- **Russian forces attempting to encircle Kharkiv continue to face supply shortages, particularly regarding ammunition.**
- **The Russian military falsely claimed to have captured the entirety of Kherson Oblast on March 15 but did not conduct any major operations toward either Zaporizhyya or Mykolayiv.**
- **Russia is unlikely to launch an unsupported amphibious operation against Odesa until Russian forces secure a ground line of communication to the city, but Russian Naval Infantry retain the capability to conduct a landing along the Black Sea coast.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 15, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 14

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko
March 14, 5:00 pm ET

Russian forces made small territorial gains in Luhansk Oblast on March 14 but did not conduct any major attacks toward Kyiv or in northeastern Ukraine. Russian forces continue to assemble reinforcements and attempt to improve logistical support in both the Kyiv and southern operational directions. Ongoing Russian efforts to replace combat losses with both Russian replacements and non-Russian sources, including Syrian fighters and the Wagner Group, are unlikely to enable Russia to resume major offensive operations within the coming week.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces conducted several limited attacks northwest of Kyiv on March 14, unsuccessfully attempting to bridge the Irpin River.
- Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations east of Kyiv and continued to prioritize improving logistics and reinforcing combat units.
- The continued ability of Ukrainian forces to carry out successful local counterattacks around Kharkiv indicates that Russian forces are unlikely to successfully bypass Kharkiv from the southeast to advance toward Dnipro and Zaporizhia in the near term.
- Russian and proxy forces continue to achieve slow but steady territorial gains in Donetsk Oblast after initial failures in the first week of the Russian invasion.
- Ukrainian forces halted resumed Russian attacks from Kherson toward Mykolayiv and Kryvyi Rih on March 14.
- Russia will likely deploy small units of Syrian fighters to Ukraine within the week and is confirmed to have deployed private military company (PMC) forces.
- Russian and Belarusian forces increased their activity near the Ukrainian border in the last 24 hours in a likely effort to pin down Ukrainian forces but likely do not have the capability to open a new axis of advance into western Ukraine.
- Russia and China deny that Russia seeks military aid from China and claimed that Russia does not need additional military support to complete its objectives in Ukraine.

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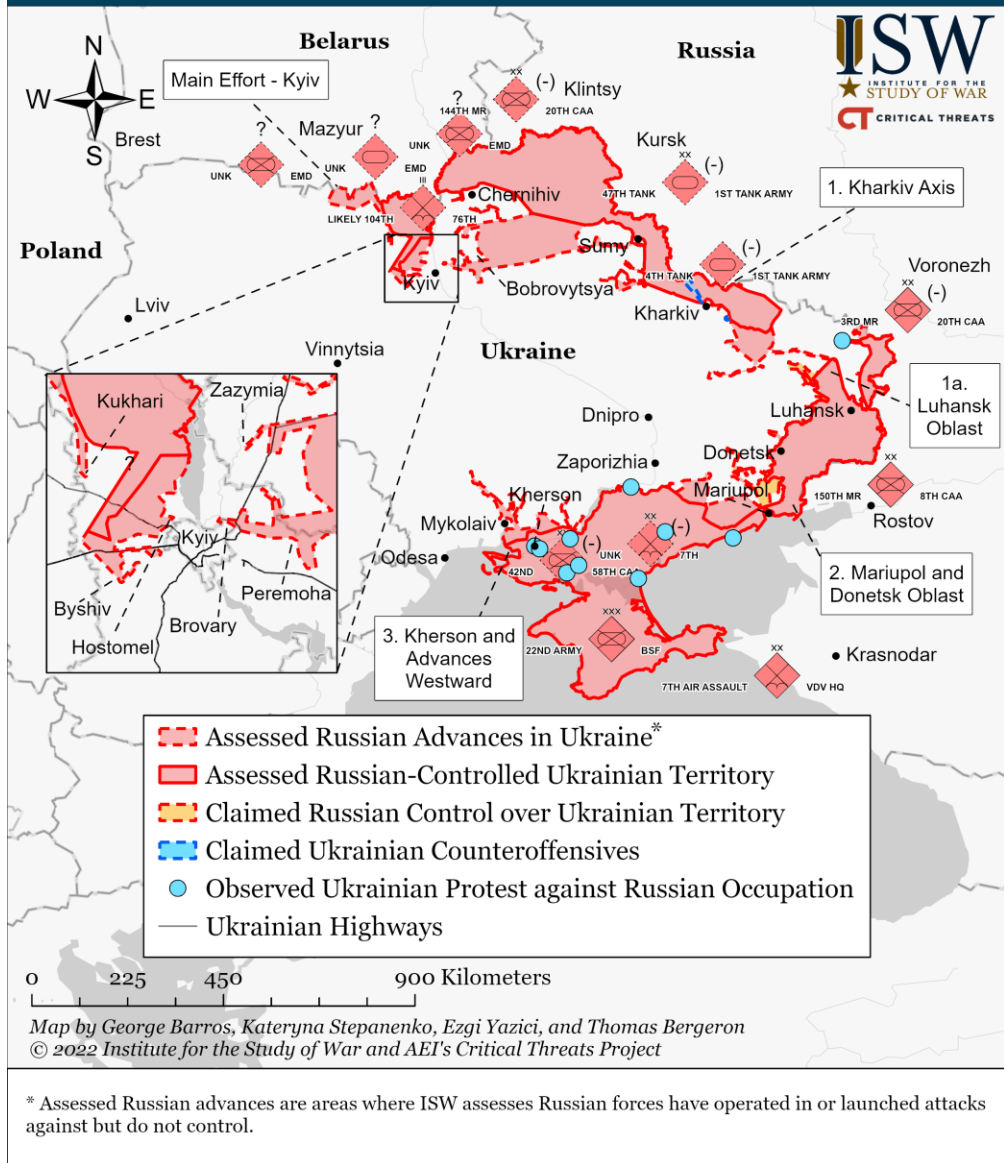
13.[1] Russian forces continue to assemble reinforcements and attempt to improve logistical support in both the Kyiv and southern operational directions. Russian forces may intend to resume larger-scale attacks on both axes of advance in the coming week, but will likely take longer to (or may never) cohere the combat power necessary to complete the encirclement of Kyiv.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations northwest of Kyiv for the third day in a row.**
- **Russian forces did not conduct attacks toward northeastern Kyiv and prioritized reinforcing their lines of communication and logistics routes.**
- **Russian and proxy forces successfully captured several towns north of Mariupol in Donetsk Oblast on March 13, the only offensive ground actions of the day.**
- **Ukrainian protests in occupied Kherson are likely expanding.**
- **Russia is diluting its international deployments in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh to reinforce operations in Ukraine and pulling additional forces from Russia's far east.**
- **Ukrainian intelligence reported Russia will deploy preexisting pro-Assad Syrian units to Ukraine, in addition to previously announced plans to recruit new Syrian and Libyan mercenaries. These forces are unlikely to enable Russia to favorably change the balance of forces around Kyiv in the next week but may provide a longer-term pool of low-quality replacements.**
- **Russian ballistic missiles killed 35 Ukrainians at the Yavoriv military training center near Poland in a likely effort to interdict Western aid deliveries to Ukraine—following up on the Kremlin's March 12 announcement it will treat international aid shipments as military targets.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 13, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 12

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 12, 4:00 pm EST

Russian forces secured limited advances east of Kyiv and north from Crimea on March 12 but continue to face logistical challenges, mounting casualties, and sustained Ukrainian counterattacks. Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations northwest of Kyiv in the past 24 hours. Russian forces made limited advances around Chernihiv and toward Kyiv's eastern outskirts after pausing for several days. Continued Ukrainian counterattacks and successful operations by Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces continue to threaten Russia's long line of communication in northeastern Ukraine. Russian forces captured unspecified "eastern outskirts" of Mariupol on March 12 and continue to shell the city in a likely effort to force it to capitulate.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations northwest of Kyiv for the second day in a row.**
- **Russian forces resumed limited attacks toward northeastern Kyiv and renewed efforts to fully encircle Chernihiv.**
- **Ongoing Ukrainian counterattacks in northeastern Ukraine are likely forcing Russia to redeploy forces away from offensive operations toward Kyiv to consolidate its long line of communication.**
- **Russian forces made limited territorial gains in eastern Mariupol and continued to shell the city.**
- **The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces conducted a new advance northeast from Kherson along the western bank of the Dnipro.**
- **The Ukrainian military claimed to have damaged or destroyed 31 Russian battalion tactical groups (BTGs) as of March 11.**
- **The Kremlin likely seeks to deter continuing Western military aid shipments to Ukraine, threatening that Russia will view Western military aid shipments to Ukraine as legitimate military targets on March 12.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

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Russian ground forces attempting to encircle and take Kyiv began another pause to resupply and refit combat units on March 11 after failed attacks March 8-10. Russian forces also appear to be largely stalemated around Kharkiv. Russian advances from Crimea toward Mykolayiv and Zaporizhya and in the east around Donetsk and Luhansk made no progress in the last 24 hours, and Russian forces in the south face growing morale and supply issues. The Ukrainian General Staff asserted Russia has so far failed to take its territorial objectives for the war and will likely increasingly turn to strikes on civilian targets and psychological operations to undermine civilian support for the Ukrainian government.[1] Uncoordinated and sporadic Russian offensive operations against major Ukrainian cities support the Ukrainian General Staff's assessment that Russian forces face growing morale and supply issues and have lost the initiative. The Ukrainian General Staff stated on March 11 that Ukrainian forces are "actively defending and conducting successful counterattacks in all directions," but did not state where reported counterattacks are occurring.[2]

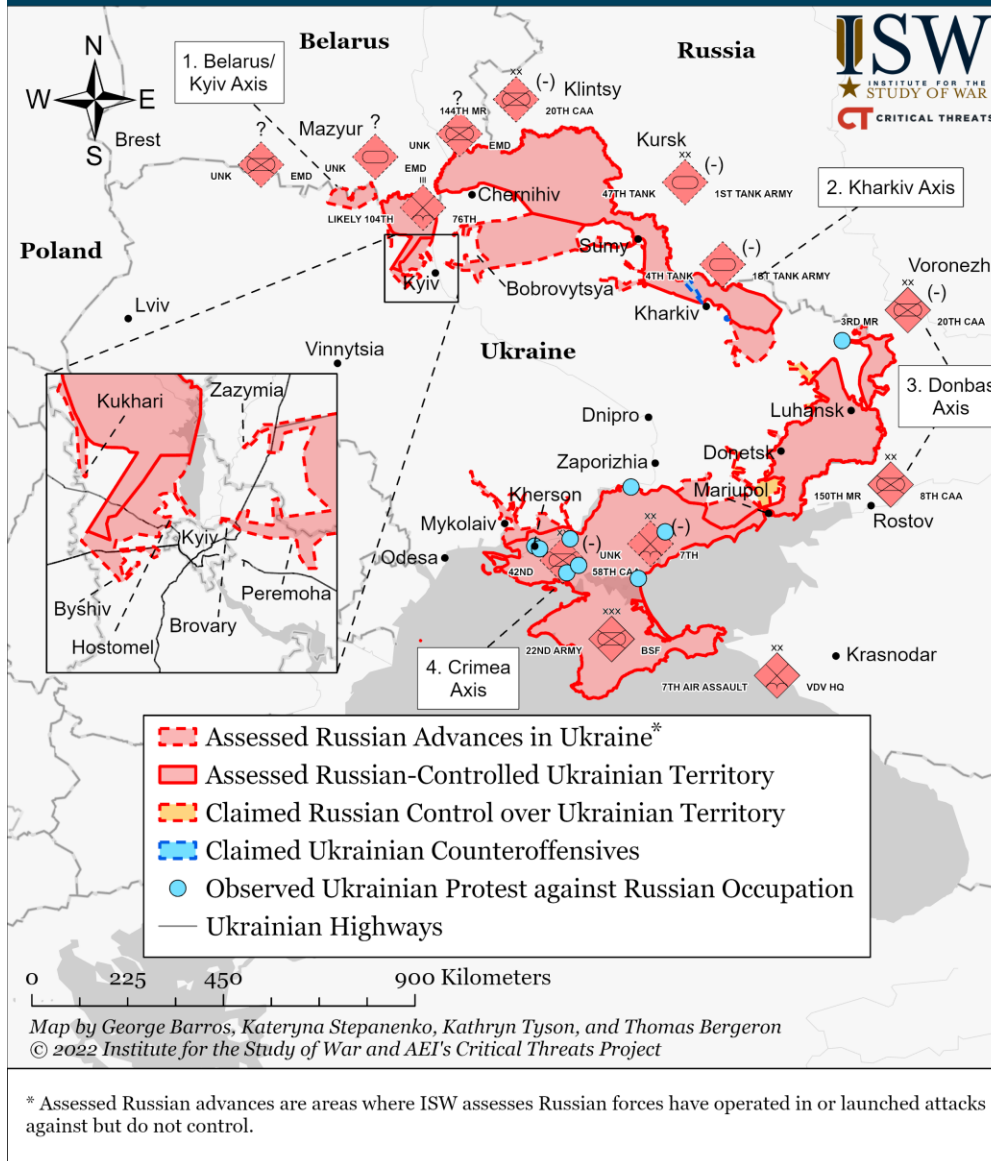
The Kremlin likely seeks to increase its combat power by drawing Belarus into the war and leveraging Syrian proxies, in addition to ongoing efforts to directly replace Russian combat losses through individual conscripts that are unlikely to be well-enough trained or motivated to generate effective new combat power. Putin is reportedly conducting an internal purge of general officers and intelligence personnel and recalibrating Russia's war effort to sustain combat operations far longer than the Kremlin initially planned. Russia likely requires a new wave of combat-effective reservists or recruits in a short period of time to achieve its objectives in Ukraine but is unlikely to be able to generate such a wave. Russian aircraft likely conducted an attempted false-flag attack on Belarusian territory on March 11. The Kremlin is likely pressuring Belarus to enter the war in Ukraine to support Russian forces, though Belarusian President Lukashenko is likely attempting to delay or prevent his entry into the war to avoid costly Western sanctions and Belarusian combat losses. The Kremlin additionally announced plans on March 11 to deploy foreign fighters, including up to 16,000 Syrian fighters, to Ukraine. The Kremlin is highly unlikely to abandon its continuing main effort to encircle and capture Kyiv and will continue to feed replacements and reinforcements into this operation.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian operations around Kyiv remained largely stalled over the past 24 hours and Russian forces conducted another pause to resupply and refit frontline units.**
- **Russian forces did not secure any new territory in northeastern Ukraine and may be redeploying forces attacking eastern Kyiv to defend against Ukrainian counterattacks in Sumy Oblast.**
- **Russian forces remain pinned down attempting to reduce Mariupol by siege and bombardment.**
- **Ukrainian forces halted Russian advances north and west from Crimea as Russian forces face growing supply and morale issues.**
- **Russian aircraft likely conducted an attempted false-flag attack on Belarusian territory on March 11 in an effort to draw Belarus into the war.**
- **The Kremlin announced plans to deploy foreign fighters, including up to 16,000 Syrian fighters, to Ukraine.**
- **Putin reportedly fired several generals and arrested FSB intelligence officers in an internal purge.**
- **Ukrainian forces killed the commander of Russia's 29th Combined Arms Army. High casualties among Russian general officers indicate the poor quality of Russian command and control, requiring Russian generals to deploy forward and risk Ukrainian fire to command their forces.**
- **Ukrainian air force and air defense operations continue to hinder Russian ground forces maneuver by likely limiting Russian close air support and exposing Russian mechanized forces to Ukrainian air and artillery attacks.**

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 11, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 10

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko
March 10, 4:00 pm EST

The likelihood is increasing that Ukrainian forces could fight to a standstill the Russian ground forces attempting to encircle and take Kyiv. Russian forces also appear to be largely stalemated around Kharkiv and distracted from efforts to seize that city. Russian advances in the south around Mykolayiv and toward Zaporizhzhya and in the east around Donetsk and Luhansk made little progress as well in the last 24 hours. Russia likely retains much greater combat power in the south and east and will probably renew more effective offensive operations in the coming days, but the effective reach and speed of such operations is questionable given the general performance of the Russian military to date. There are as yet no indications that the Russian military is reorganizing, reforming, learning lessons, or taking other measures that would lead to a sudden change in the pace or success of its operations, although the numerical disparities between Russia and Ukraine leave open the possibility that Moscow will be able to restore rapid mobility or effective urban warfare to the battlefield.

Russian forces around Kyiv did not attempt to renew offensive operations on a multi-battalion scale on March 10 following the failure of limited efforts on March 8-9. Ukrainian forces badly damaged a Russian armored column in the Brovary area east of Kyiv, likely further disrupting Russian efforts to set conditions for offensive operations on the east bank of the Dnipro. Ukrainian resistance all along the Russian lines of communication from eastern Kyiv to the Russian border near Sumy continues to disrupt Russian efforts to bring more combat power to bear near the capital. The episodic, limited, and largely unsuccessful Russian offensive operations around Kyiv increasingly support the Ukrainian General Staff's repeated assessments that Russia lacks the combat power near the capital to launch successful offensive operations on a large scale.

Key Takeaways

- Russian operations around Kyiv remained largely stalled over the past 24 hours.
- Ukrainian forces badly damaged a Russian armored unit east of the capital, likely disrupting Russian efforts to encircle or assault the city from the east.
- Russian forces continue to struggle in efforts to seize Chernihiv city and to secure the long ground lines of communication from Sumy, which the Ukrainians still hold, to eastern Kyiv.
- A new Russian invasion from western Belarus, with or without Belarusian ground forces' support, appears increasingly unlikely.
- Russian forces remain pinned down attempting to reduce Mariupol by siege and bombardment.
- Russian efforts to bypass Mykolayiv and establish a reliable ground line of communication across the Southern Bug River to the north of Mykolayiv remain stalled.
- Ukrainian air force and air defense operations continue to hinder Russian ground forces maneuver by likely limiting Russian close air support and exposing Russian mechanized forces to Ukrainian air and artillery attacks.

Warning Update: Russia May Conduct a Chemical or Radiological False-Flag Attack as a Pretext for Greater Aggression against Ukraine

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

By Katherine Lawlor with Kateryna Stepanenko

Key takeaway: The Kremlin has set informational conditions to blame Ukraine for a Russian-conducted or Russian-fabricated chemical or radiological false-flag attack against civilians as a pretext for further Russian escalation. The Kremlin is likely still evaluating this course of action but is building out the necessary conditions to justify broader violence against civilians. That risk must be addressed. The United States and NATO must "pre-bunk" such Kremlin efforts, destroy in advance Moscow's efforts to

create informational cover for escalation, and deter Russia's potential use of a chemical or radiological weapon.

Recent Russian state media narratives have built upon a long-running Kremlin information operation to falsely claim that Ukraine, the United States, and NATO are plotting a chemical or radiological attack on Russia or Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory. Russia may conduct or fabricate such an attack and blame Ukraine and NATO to justify additional aggression against Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 9

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Fredrick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 9, 3:00 PM EST

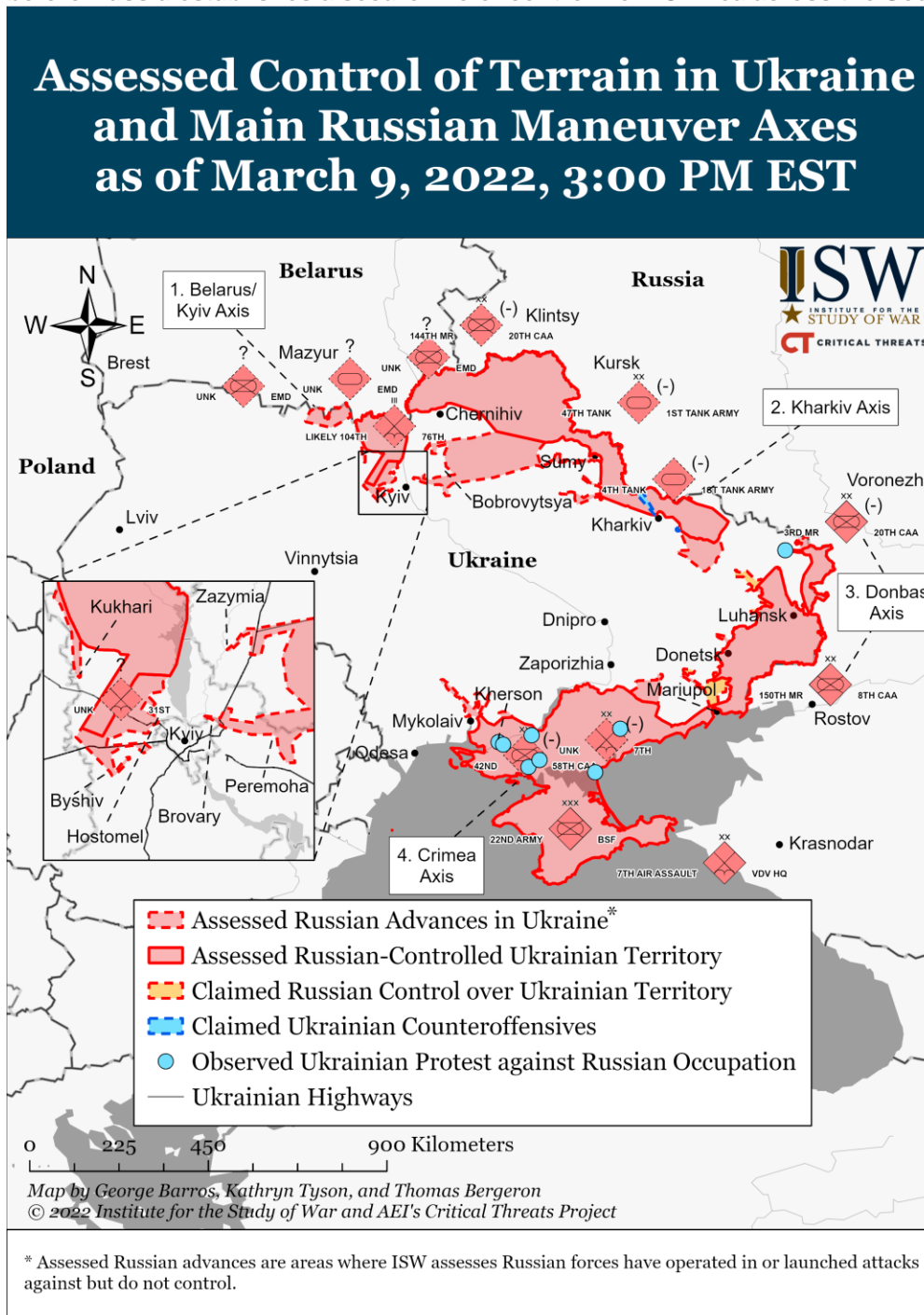
Russian operations to continue the encirclement of and assault on Kyiv have likely begun, although on a smaller scale and in a more ad hoc manner than ISW expected. The equivalent of a Russian reinforced brigade reportedly tried to advance toward Kyiv through its western outskirts and made little progress. Smaller operations continued slowly to consolidate and gradually to extend the encirclement to the southwest of the capital. Russian operations in the eastern approaches to Kyiv remain in a lull, likely because the Russians are focusing on securing the long lines of communication running to those outskirts from Russian bases around Sumy and Chernihiv in the face of skillful and determined Ukrainian harassment of those lines. The battle for Kyiv is likely to continue to be a drawn-out affair unless the Russians can launch a more concentrated and coherent attack than they have yet shown the ability to conduct.

The Russian military is clearly struggling to mobilize reserve manpower to offset losses and fill out new units. The Kremlin admitted that conscripts have been fighting in Ukraine (in violation of Russian law) for the first time on March 9, although in a customarily bizarre fashion: according to the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin himself discovered that conscripts were operating in Ukraine while he was reviewing a report on the conflict. The Kremlin says Russian military judicial authorities will reportedly open an investigation into this practice and punish those responsible.[1] Putin himself would, of course, ultimately be responsible for having issued the mobilization orders that sent conscripts to the front. Reports have also surfaced that students at medical and theater schools were being conscripted in late February, along with some denials of those reports.[2] Social media users also flagged the movement of Russian peacekeeping forces in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, speculating that they may be withdrawing to participate in the war in Ukraine.[3] ISW cannot independently verify any of these reports. Their general tenor, however, aligns with our published assessment that Russia faces challenges in generating a new wave of combat-effective reservists or recruits in a short period of time and our assessment that Russia will need such a wave to complete its objectives.[4]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces have likely begun renewed offensive operations into Kyiv and to continue its encirclement on the west, but have not made much progress.**
- **Russian troops east of the Dnipro near Kyiv are likely attempting to consolidate their lines of communication against significant Ukrainian counter-attacks and disruption to set conditions for attacking the capital from the east.**
- **Russia is unlikely to attempt to seize Kharkiv through a ground offensive in the coming days, but will probably continue efforts to encircle and/or bypass it.**
- **Russian and Russian proxy forces in Donetsk and Luhansk are driving to gain control of the full territorial extent of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, but have not yet done so.**
- **Mariupol remains encircled and under bombardment.**
- **Russian forces continue to prepare for operations against Zaporizhya City but have not yet initiated them at scale.**

- Russian forces from Kherson appear to be encircling Mykolayiv from the east but have not yet crossed the Southern Bug River. Russian operations against Odesa are unlikely to commence before Russia establishes a secure line of control from Crimea across the Southern Bug.



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 8

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Fredrick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko
March 8, 3:00 PM EST

Russian forces continued concentrating in the eastern, northwestern, and western outskirts of Kyiv for an assault on the capital in the coming 24-96 hours. The reported appearance of forces belonging to Chechen leader Ramazan Kadyrov, Russia's Rosgvardia internal security formations, and the Liga (former Wagner) Private Military Company in the western outskirts of Kyiv may indicate that the Russian military is struggling to assemble sufficient conventional combat power to launch its assault on the capital. Russian forces near Kyiv made limited gains and prepared for limited drives to continue their attempted encirclement to the west.

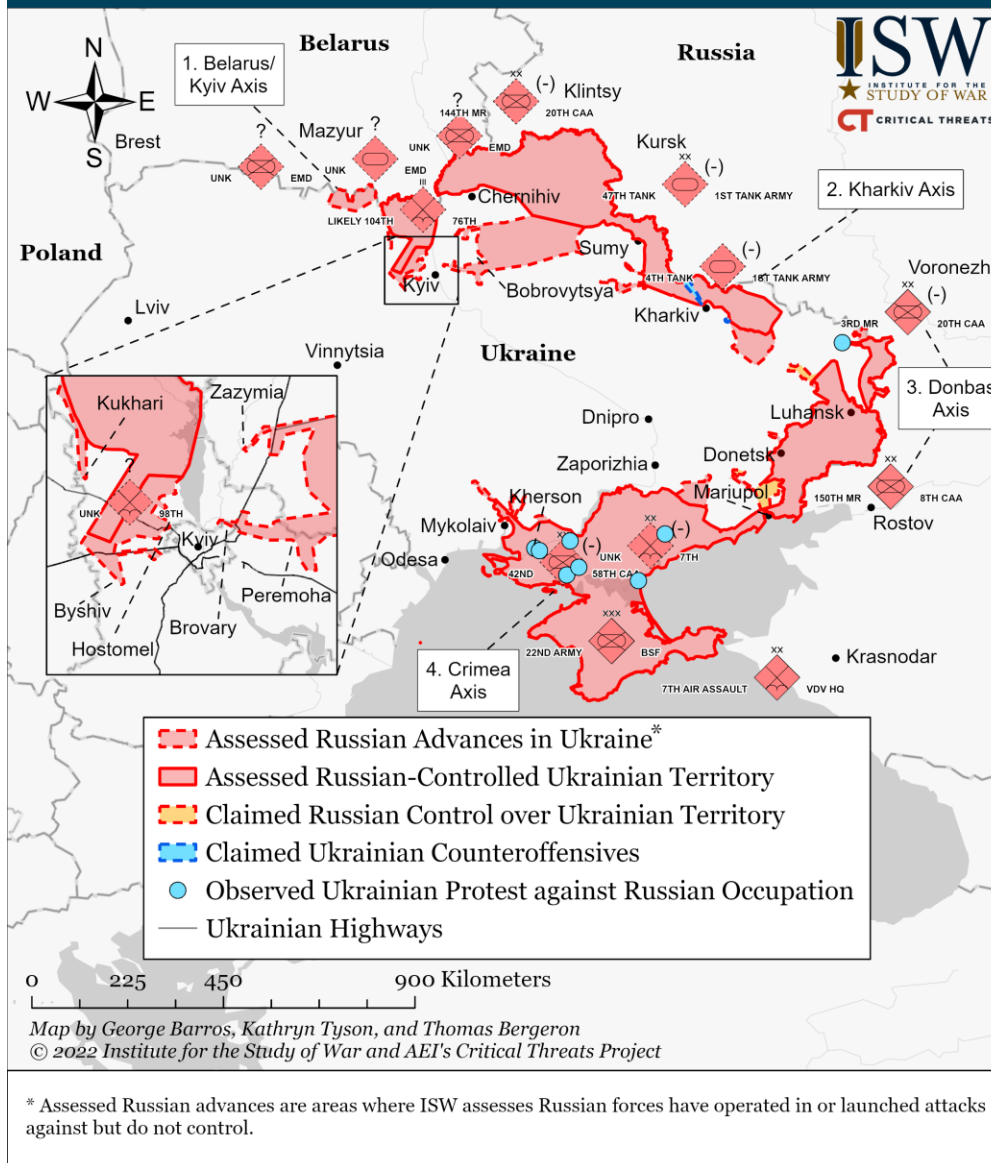
Ukrainian forces have continued to challenge the lengthy Russian ground lines of communication leading from near Sumy to eastern Kyiv. Russian forces near Kharkiv have been steadily diverting to secure and extend those lines over the past few days, as we have reported. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 8 that Russian troops currently near Chernihiv appear to be moving east. We assess that those forces may seek to link up with troops coming from near Sumy to help them consolidate and protect their extended lines in support of the planned offensive against Kyiv.

The situation in eastern Ukraine and southwestern Ukraine remained largely unchanged in the past 24 hours. Ukrainian General Staff reporting of additional Russian efforts to advance on the city of Zaporizhya likely confirm that Russia intends to make blocking that city a priority. The forces Russia is so far moving toward Zaporizhya appear to be far too small to encircle or take it.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are consolidating and preparing for further operations along the western and eastern outskirts of Kyiv, especially in the Irpin area in the west and the Brovary area in the east;**
- **Ukrainian forces are challenging the extended Russian lines reaching from Sumy, which Russian forces have not yet taken, to the eastern outskirts of Kyiv;**
- **Russian troops are likely attempting to bypass Mykolayiv and cross the Southern Bug upriver of that city to permit an advance on Odesa combined with an impending amphibious operation against that city; and**
- **Russian forces are also driving north from Crimea toward the city of Zaporizhya.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 8, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 7

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Fredrick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 7, 3:00 PM EST

Russian forces are concentrating in the eastern, northwestern, and western outskirts of Kyiv for an assault on the capital in the coming 24-96 hours. The Russians are bringing up supplies and reinforcements as well as conducting artillery, air, and missile attacks to weaken defenses and intimidate defenders in advance of such an assault. It is too soon to gauge the likely effectiveness of

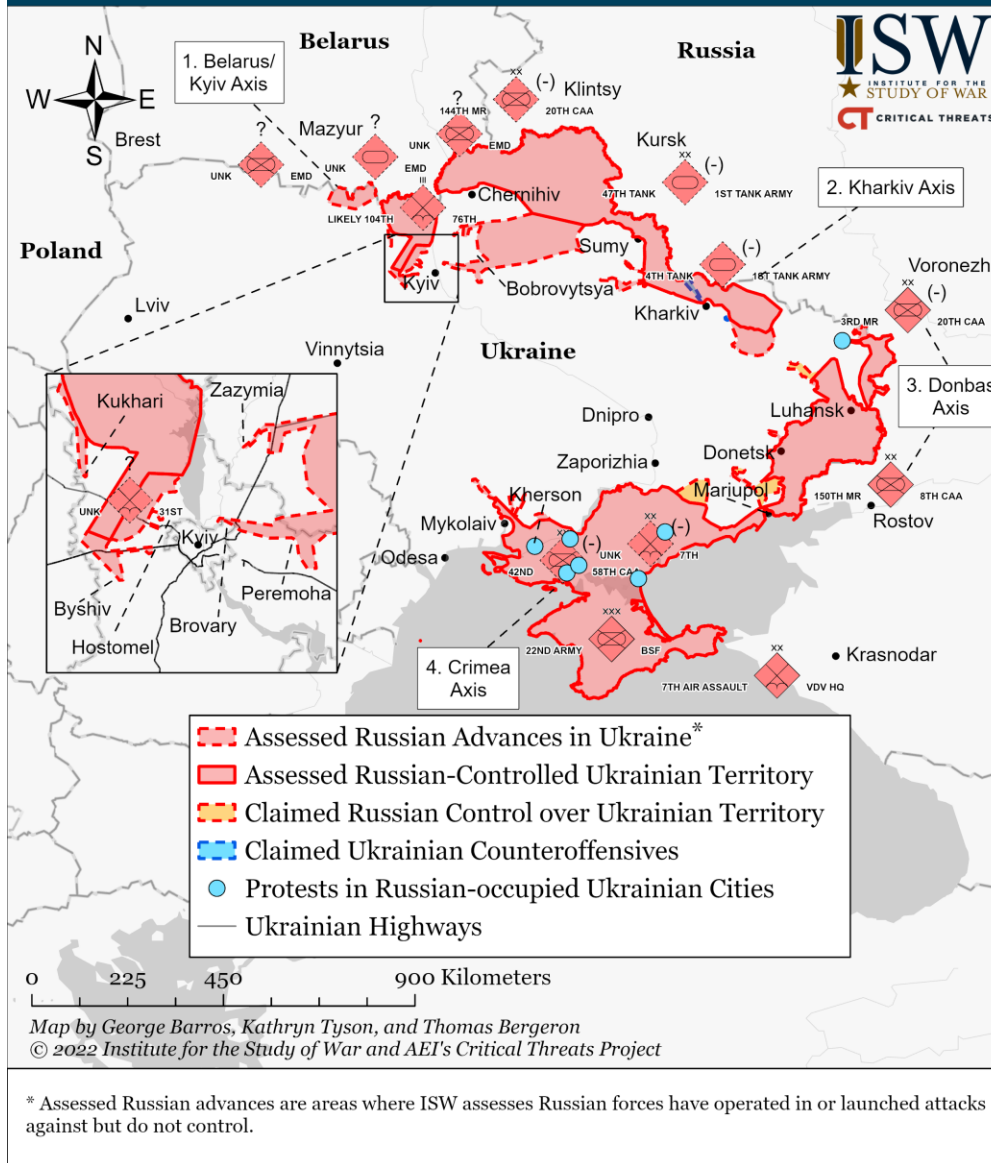
any Russian attempt to complete the encirclement of Kyiv or to seize the city at this time. If Russian troops have been able to resupply, reorganize, and plan deliberate and coordinated simultaneous operations along the several axes of advance around and into the capital, they may be more successful in this operation than they have in previous undertakings. Operations near Kyiv in the past 72 hours have not offered enough evidence to evaluate that likelihood.

Russian troops in southern Ukraine continue to divide their efforts between attacks westward toward Mykolayiv and Odesa, attacks northward toward Zaporizhya, and attacks eastward toward Mariupol and Donbas. Failure to focus on any single line of advance has likely hindered Russian operations and will probably continue to do so. Russian troops in Kherson Oblast appear to be feeling their way around Mykolayiv, likely seeking to find a route across the Southern Bug River that would allow them to bypass Mykolayiv itself and resume their advance on Odesa. Those heading toward Zaporizhya currently lack the combat power likely necessary to encircle or take that large city. They could, however, set conditions for successful operations against Zaporizhya once reinforcements arrive following the fall of Mariupol and the opening of a wide land route westward from Donbas.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces are consolidating and preparing for further operations along the western and eastern outskirts of Kyiv, especially in the Irpin area on the west and the Brovary area on the east;**
- **Ukrainian forces are challenging the extended Russian lines reaching from Sumy, which Russian forces have not yet taken, to the eastern outskirts of Kyiv;**
- **Russian troops are likely attempting to bypass Mykolayiv and cross the Southern Bug upriver of that city to permit an advance on Odesa that will combine with an impending amphibious operation against that city; and**
- **Russian forces are driving north from Crimea toward the city of Zaporizhya.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 7, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Ukraine Conflict Update 16

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

Key Takeaways March 5-6

- Russian forces spent the past 24 hours largely regrouping and preparing to renew offensive operations around Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Mykolayiv.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reports the presence of a large concentration of Russian forces west of Kharkiv that it assesses will launch a wide offensive southwest toward the Dnipro River, although no such offensive has begun as of this publication.
- Russia violated two Russian-Ukrainian ceasefire agreements, collapsing efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor to help evacuate civilians from Mariupol and Volnovakha on March 5 and 6.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin has not demonstrated any willingness to de-escalate with Ukraine or the international community, nor has he provided reasonable demands that would lay the groundwork for de-escalation or negotiations.
- The Kremlin is likely laying the domestic information groundwork for a declaration of martial law in Russia should Russian President Vladimir Putin decide that mass mobilization and conscription are necessary to achieve his objectives.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin allowed for the confiscation of assets belonging to “corrupt” Russian officials on March 6, likely to acquire new revenue streams at the expense of alienating some supporters.
- The Kremlin is attempting to deter US or European bans on Russian oil exports by claiming that a ban would devastate world oil markets.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin compared Western sanctions to a “declaration of war” on March 5 as the Kremlin began to retaliate against foreign businesses.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 6

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Fredrick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko
March 6, 2:00 PM EST

The military situation on the ground has not changed significantly in the past 24 hours. Russian forces continue to mass for renewed offensive operations east and west of Kyiv, west of Kharkiv, and toward Mykolayiv-Odesa but have not yet initiated new large-scale ground attacks. Russia has increased aerial and artillery/rocket attacks on civilian positions and infrastructure, including known evacuation corridors. Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a second counter-attack in two days, this time near Mariupol. The Ukrainian air force and air defense forces continue to operate, inflicting damage on Russian ground forces and disrupting Russian air and missile operations.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces spent the past 24 hours largely regrouping and preparing for renewing offensive operations around Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Mykolayiv.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reports the presence of a large concentration of Russian forces west of Kharkiv that it assesses will launch a wide offensive southwest toward the Dnipro River, although no such offensive has begun as of this publication.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 6, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Confirmed Russian units in the past 24 hours:

Russia deployed elements of the 6th Combined Arms Army and 1st Tank Army to prepare to attack Chernihiv and Nizhyn.

Elements of the 239th Tank Regiment and 80th Tank Regiment of the 90th Tank Division of the 41st Combined Arms Army attacked an unidentified location, likely in Chernihiv.

Elements of the 36th Motorized Rifle Brigade attacked an unidentified location, likely in Kyiv Oblast.

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 5

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Fredrick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 5, 3:00 PM EST

Russian forces in Ukraine may have entered a possibly brief operational pause on March 5 as they prepare to resume operations against Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mykolayiv, and possibly Odesa in the next 24-48 hours. Russian troops did not launch major ground offensive operations against Kyiv, Kharkiv, or Mykolayiv in the last 24 hours. Ukrainian forces near Kharkiv, on the other hand, conducted a counter-offensive that reportedly penetrated to the Ukrainian-Russian border.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces conducted no major offensive operations against the cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, or Mykolayiv in the past 24 hours;**
- **Russian troops continued to encircle, bomb, and shell Mariupol;**
- **Russian forces east of Kharkiv and in northern Luhansk Oblast appear to be trying to link up;**
- **Russian troops around Kherson city are likely preparing to resume offensive operations against Mykolayiv and ultimately Odesa; and**
- **Russian naval infantry in Crimea continue to prepare for amphibious operations, which would most likely occur near Odesa.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 5, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Confirmed Russian units in the past 24 hours:

The 488th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division of the 20th Combined Arms Army attacked Kharkiv Oblast.

Elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division attacked Donetsk Oblast.

Elements of the 43rd Separate Naval Assault Aviation Regiment attacked Mykolaiv Oblast.

Elements of the 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 5th Combined Arms Army (CAA) of the Eastern Military District attacked either Kyiv or Chernihiv Oblast.

Elements of the 49th CAA, 22nd Army Corps, and the 7th Airborne Assault Division attacked in the direction of Mariupol and Zaporizhia.

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Explainer on Russian Conscription, Reserve, and Mobilization

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Brian Babcock-Lumish, Frederick W. Kagan, Kateryna Stepanenko

March 5, 2022

- *The early announcement of the 2022 spring draft is unlikely to increase Russian combat power in Ukraine in the near term.*
- *Recent Russian efforts to create a Western-style reserve force are unlikely to materially impact combat operations in Ukraine.*
- *As Russia exhausts its high-readiness units staffed with contract soldiers, the quality of reinforcements is likely to be much lower than the units first committed to the invasion.*

The Russian military is a hybrid format combining a traditional cadre-and-reserve conscript system and a contract-professional system. While the Russian Army has made efforts to professionalize its ranks, particularly in the last 15 years, it remains reliant on conscripts, both for its active-duty force and for its reserve forces in the event of general mobilization.[1] Most combat units must be filled out by conscripts or mobilized reservists in order to be combat-capable. Contract soldiers are concentrated in the cadre and elite units, especially the airborne units.

The cadre-and-reserve units of the Russian Armed Forces are maintained at a low readiness with a limited number of professional staff and conscripts, with the expectation that they would be staffed with reservists in the event of mobilization.[2] The Russians have already used many cadre-and-reserve units in Ukraine, and they have not performed well against the Ukrainians, with some units suffering heavy losses. Russia does not likely have a large reserve of highly skilled contract units remaining, although there are probably some uncommitted forces.

Ukraine Conflict Update 15

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

Key Takeaways March 4

- Russian forces have advanced rapidly on the eastern outskirts of Kyiv, likely from the Sumy axis, and may attempt to encircle and/or attack the capital on the east bank of the Dnipro in the coming 24-48 hours.
- Russian troops did not press a ground offensive against Kharkiv in the last 24 hours but have instead diverted forces to the west and southeast, likely supporting efforts against Kyiv and in and around Donbas respectively.
- Russian troops have surrounded Mariupol and are attacking it brutally to destroy it or compel its capitulation.
- Russian forces have renewed their ground advance on Mykolayiv, having secured Kherson city, likely to set conditions for a further attack toward Odesa. Russian naval infantry are likely poised to conduct amphibious landings near Odesa when Russian forces have secured or are close to securing a reliable ground route from Crimea to Odesa.
- The Kremlin dramatically limited Russia's already isolated domestic information environment and criminalized unfavorable coverage of the war in Ukraine on March 4, setting conditions to improve the domestic efficacy of its information operations.
- Ukraine is attempting to increase the flow of information about Russia's invasion of Ukraine to Russian citizens to increase domestic Russian opposition to the war.
- The Kremlin set conditions to justify potential Russian conscriptions and more aggressive operations in Ukraine.
- The Russian Defense Ministry said foreign citizens fighting for Ukraine will not be considered legal combatants and will not be protected under international law.
- Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko reiterated that Belarus will not enter the war in Ukraine but has likely already committed Belarusian troops.
- NATO rejected Ukraine's request to establish a no-fly zone over Ukraine.

- Russia has not yet followed through on its agreement with Ukraine to establish the humanitarian corridors that would enable civilian supply and evacuation.
- The US Department of Defense established a deconfliction line with its Russian counterpart to prevent accidental escalation near the Ukrainian and Belarusian borders.
- Finland and Sweden continued high-level discussions on NATO membership and multilateral defense measures.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 4

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

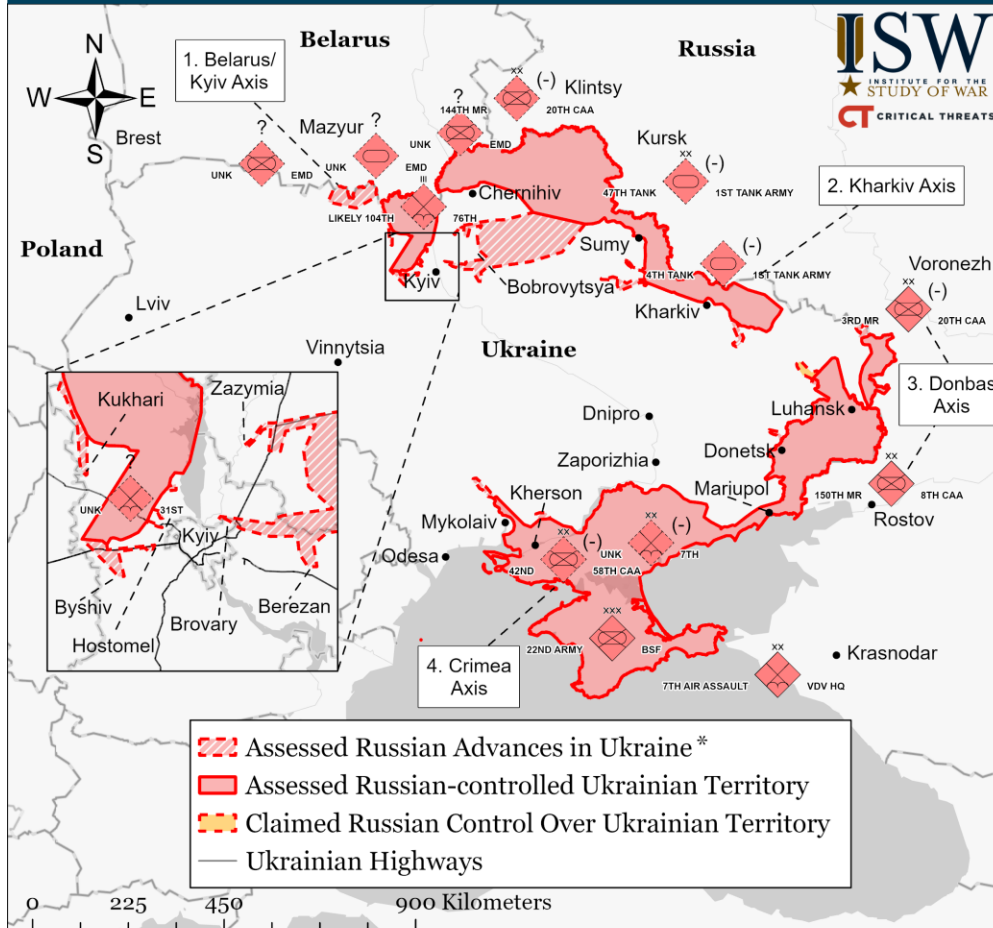
Frederick W. Kagan, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 4, 3:00 pm EST

Russian forces continue their focus on encircling Kyiv. The western envelopment remains bogged down but Russian troops have moved more rapidly from the east and are arriving in the capital's outskirts on the Sumy axis. The speed of the advance from the east is likely to slow as Russian forces leave sparsely-inhabited and flat terrain and enter the more congested and built-up eastern suburbs. Russian mechanized forces around Kharkiv appear to be supporting operations toward the east and west of the city, likely weakening their ability to encircle or seize it.

The Russian military has concentrated considerable combat power around Mariupol to encircle and ultimately seize or destroy it. The purpose of this effort is not entirely clear. The capture or destruction of Mariupol will not likely materially affect the outcome of the war, whose decisive operations are more than 600 kilometers northwest around Kyiv. Russian forces have also renewed their ground offensive west from Crimea toward Odesa, currently focusing on advancing from Kherson to Mykolayiv, and seized the Zaporizhyya Nuclear Power Plant north of Crimea. The continued pursuit of objectives along three diverging axes by the same group of forces in Crimea has hindered the Russian military's ability to generate decisive effects on any of the three.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 4, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Map by George Barros, Kathryn Tyson, and Thomas Bergeron
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Confirmed Russian units in the past 24 hours:

Elements of the Central Military District and 14th Army Corps (Northern Fleet) attacked Oster, Zazimya, Berezan, and Vyshenky in the direction of Kyiv.

Elements of the 20th Combined Arms Army (CAA) attacked Novoaidar and Severodonetsk, Luhansk Oblast.

Elements of the 8th CAA attacked Mariupol and Novooleksandrivka, Donetsk Oblast.

Elements of the Ulyanovsk-based 31st Air Assault Brigade attacked Hostomel, Kyiv Oblast.

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Ukraine Conflict Update 14

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

Key Takeaways March 3

- Russian forces opened a new line of advance from Belarus south toward Zhytomyr Oblast, west of Kyiv, as Russian forces attempting to encircle Kyiv from the northwest were driven further west by determined Ukrainian resistance and counterattacks. Russian forces will struggle to complete an encirclement of Kyiv at all if they have to advance along ring roads as far from the city center as those they are now using.
- Russian forces on the east bank of the Dnipro River remain unable to secure the important town of Chernihiv or to break through Ukrainian defenses in the northeastern outskirts of Kyiv.
- Russian ground forces have remained relatively static near Kharkiv as Russian artillery, air, and missile bombardments wreak devastation in the city, though the Ukrainian military indicates that a regiment-sized Russian formation will try to envelop or bypass Kharkiv in the coming days.
- Russian forces are attempting once again to open a line of advance through northern Luhansk Oblast, possibly to assist efforts at Kharkiv or, as the Ukrainian General Staff assesses, to drive on Dnipro and Zaporozhya. The Russian forces currently reported as engaging in that drive are far too small to attack either city successfully and are probably insufficient to sustain a long drive on their own.
- Russian troops have surrounded Mariupol and are attacking it brutally to compel its capitulation or destroy it.
- The mayor of Kherson conditionally surrendered to the Russians, allowing Russian forces to renew their advance on Mykolayiv. The Ukrainian military nevertheless reportedly defeated an attempted Russian air assault to take an airfield near Mykolayiv.
- The Kremlin escalated domestic censorship of Ukraine coverage and accused Western platforms of launching disinformation campaigns.
- Sweden and Finland are increasing cooperation with each other and NATO and may consider NATO membership due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Georgia and Moldova officially applied to join the European Union.
- Western intelligence sources reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping had prior knowledge of the Russian invasion and asked Russia to delay operations until after the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 3

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 3, 4:00 pm EST

The Russian military has continued its unsuccessful attempts to encircle Kyiv and capture Kharkiv. The Russians continued to attack piecemeal, committing a few battalion tactical groups at a time rather than concentrating overwhelming force to achieve decisive effects. Russian commanders appear to prefer opening up new lines of advance for regiment-sized operations but have been unable to achieve meaningful synergies between efforts along different axes toward the same objectives. They have also continued conducting operations in southern Ukraine along three diverging axes rather than concentrating on one or attempting mutually supporting efforts. These failures of basic operational art—long a strong suit of the Soviet military and heavily studied at Russian military academies—remain inexplicable as does the Russian military's failure to gain air superiority or at least to ground the Ukrainian Air Force. The Russian conventional military continues to underperform badly, although it may still wear down and defeat the conventional Ukrainian military by sheer force of numbers and brutality. Initial indications that Russia is mobilizing reinforcements from as far away as the Pacific Ocean are concerning in this respect. Those indications also suggest, however, that the Russian General

Staff has concluded that the forces it initially concentrated for the invasion of Ukraine will be insufficient to achieve Moscow's military objectives.

Operations to envelop Kyiv remain Russia's main effort. Russian troops are also continuing three supporting efforts, one to seize Kharkiv, one to take Mariupol and secure the "land bridge" connecting Rostov-on-Don to Crimea, and one to secure Kherson and set conditions for a drive west toward Mykolayiv and Odesa.

The Russian attack on Kyiv likely consists of a main effort aimed at enveloping and ultimately encircling the city from the west and a supporting effort along the axes from Chernihiv and Sumy to encircle it from the east.

Russian forces in the south resumed offensive operations toward Mykolayiv on March 3 after securing Kherson on March 2, but do not appear to pose an imminent danger to Odesa. Russian forces likely seek to force Mariupol to capitulate by destroying critical civilian infrastructure and killing civilians to create a humanitarian catastrophe—an approach Russian forces have repeatedly taken in Syria.^[1]

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces opened a new line of advance from Belarus south toward Zhytomyr Oblast, west of Kyiv, as Russian forces attempting to encircle Kyiv from the northwest were driven further west by determined Ukrainian resistance and counterattacks. Russian forces will struggle to complete an encirclement of Kyiv at all if they have to advance along ring roads as far from the city center as those they are now using.
- Russian forces on the east bank of the Dnipro River remain unable to secure the important town of Chernihiv or to break through Ukrainian defenses in the northeastern outskirts of Kyiv.
- Russian ground forces have remained relatively static near Kharkiv as Russian artillery, air, and missile bombardments wreak devastation in the city. The Ukrainian military indicates that a regiment-sized Russian formation will try to envelop or bypass Kharkiv in the coming days. Similar Russian attempts at such operations elsewhere in Ukraine render the success of such an undertaking at that scale unlikely.
- Russian forces are attempting once again to open a line of advance through northern Luhansk Oblast, possibly to assist efforts at Kharkiv or, as the Ukrainian General Staff assesses, to drive on Dnipro and Zaporzhya. The Russian forces currently reported as engaging in that drive are far too small to attack either city successfully and are probably insufficient to sustain a long drive on their own.
- Russian troops have surrounded Mariupol and are attacking it brutally to compel its capitulation or destroy it.
- The mayor of Kherson conditionally surrendered to the Russians, allowing Russian forces to renew their advance on Mykolayiv, which they have done. The Ukrainian military nevertheless reportedly defeated an attempted Russian air assault to take an airfield near Mykolayiv.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 3, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Confirmed Russian units in the past 24 hours:

Elements of the 2nd Combined Arms Army (CAA) attacked Peremoha in the direction of Brovary, Kyiv Oblast.

Elements of the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 14th Army Corps (Northern Military District) attacked in the direction of Brovary, Kyiv Oblast.

Elements of the 2nd Motorized Rifle Division of the 1st Tank Army attacked Chernihiv Oblast.

Elements of the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) attacked Kamenka-Dneprovskaya, Zaporizhzhia Oblast.

Elements of the 1st Tank Army, 6th CAA, and 20th CAA attacked Okhtyrka, Bogodukhiv, Chuhuiv, and Shevchenkove, Kharkiv Oblast.

Ukrainian forces killed Russian Major General Andrey Sukhovetskiy, a Spetsnaz commander and the deputy commander of the 41st Combined Arms Army.

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Ukraine Conflict Update 13

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Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

With The Critical Threats Project, AEI

Key Takeaways March 2, 2022

- Russian forces resumed offensive operations against Kyiv's western outskirts on March 2 after pausing for resupply from February 27 to March 1 but failed to secure any additional territory.
- Russian forces launched offensive operations in Zhytomyr Oblast, expanding their envelopment of Kyiv further west than ISW previously assessed—likely to outflank stronger-than-anticipated Ukrainian resistance and limited Ukrainian counterattacks in Kyiv's outskirts.
- Russian forces renewed advances toward northeastern Kyiv on March 2, reaching a line approximately 65km from the city center on that axis.
- Russian forces assaulted central Kharkiv and continued to heavily bombard the city on March 2, likely increasing civilian casualties.
- Russian forces fully encircled Mariupol as of March 2 and are conducting a deliberate campaign to destroy critical civilian infrastructure and residential areas in a likely attempt to force the city to surrender.
- Russian forces continued to reduce pockets of Ukrainian resistance in Kherson on March 2 and will likely secure the city in the next 24 hours if they have not done so already.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense released implausibly low Russian fatality counts for the first time on March 2, preparing the Russian population for the arrival of injured and killed service members back to Russia.
- The Kremlin made inconsistent statements regarding negotiations with Ukraine but agreed to a second round of talks scheduled for March 3.
- The Kremlin continued trying to control the domestic and international narrative around the invasion by restricting Russian citizens' freedom of speech and access to information while framing Ukraine and the West as aggressors.
- The Kremlin continued to struggle with Western sanctions while it set conditions for longer-term domestic capabilities.
- Ukrainian defense officials claimed Ukrainian forces thwarted an assassination attempt targeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky after a tip from anti-war Russian intelligence officers on March 1.
- Western states announced additional sanctions targeting Russia and Belarus while more private companies suspended operations in Russia.
- NATO and EU countries continued delivering lethal military aid to Ukraine on March 2.
- International organizations and Western leaders are increasingly concerned about Russia's indiscriminate targeting of civilians and use of banned weapons as civilian casualties rise.
- The UN General Assembly voted on March 2 overwhelmingly in favor of a motion demanding Russia stop military operations in Ukraine; China and India abstained.
- Record-setting refugee flows began to strain the support structures in states neighboring Ukraine on March 2.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Ukrainian officials urged caution as Russian forces advanced toward another Ukrainian nuclear power plant on March 1 and 2.
- Global oil and gas prices continued to skyrocket despite Western efforts to avoid sanctioning Russia's energy sector.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 2

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

With The Critical Threats Project, AEI

Key Takeaways March 2, 2022

- Russian forces resumed offensive operations against Kyiv's western outskirts on March 2 after pausing for resupply February 27-March 1 but failed to secure any additional territory.
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- Russian forces continued to reduce pockets of Ukrainian resistance in Kherson on March 2 and will likely secure the city in the next 24 hours if they have not done so already.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 2, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Confirmed Russian units in the past 24 hours:

Elements of the 10th Special Purpose Brigade (Subordinate to the Russian General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate) attacked Mykolaiv Oblast.

Elements of the 36th Combined Arms Army (CAA) of the Eastern Military District attacked Kyiv Oblast.

Elements of the 11th Airborne Forces (VDV) attacked an unspecified location in the Northern Operational District.

Pilots of the 23rd Fighter Aviation Regiment (11th Air and Air Defense Forces Army of the Eastern Military District) struck civilian infrastructure in unspecified locations Ukraine.

Correction: ISW previously incorrectly reported that Russian elements observed in Bobrovytsya on March 1 were engaged in an effort to link up with Russian forces from the Sumy axis. ISW now assesses these forces are advancing directly southwest on Kyiv, not pivoting east from Russia's existing axis of advance. ISW also adjusted assessed Russian control of terrain in Chernihiv based on new information.

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Ukraine Conflict Update 12

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Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

With The Critical Threats Project, AEI

Key Takeaways March 1, 2022

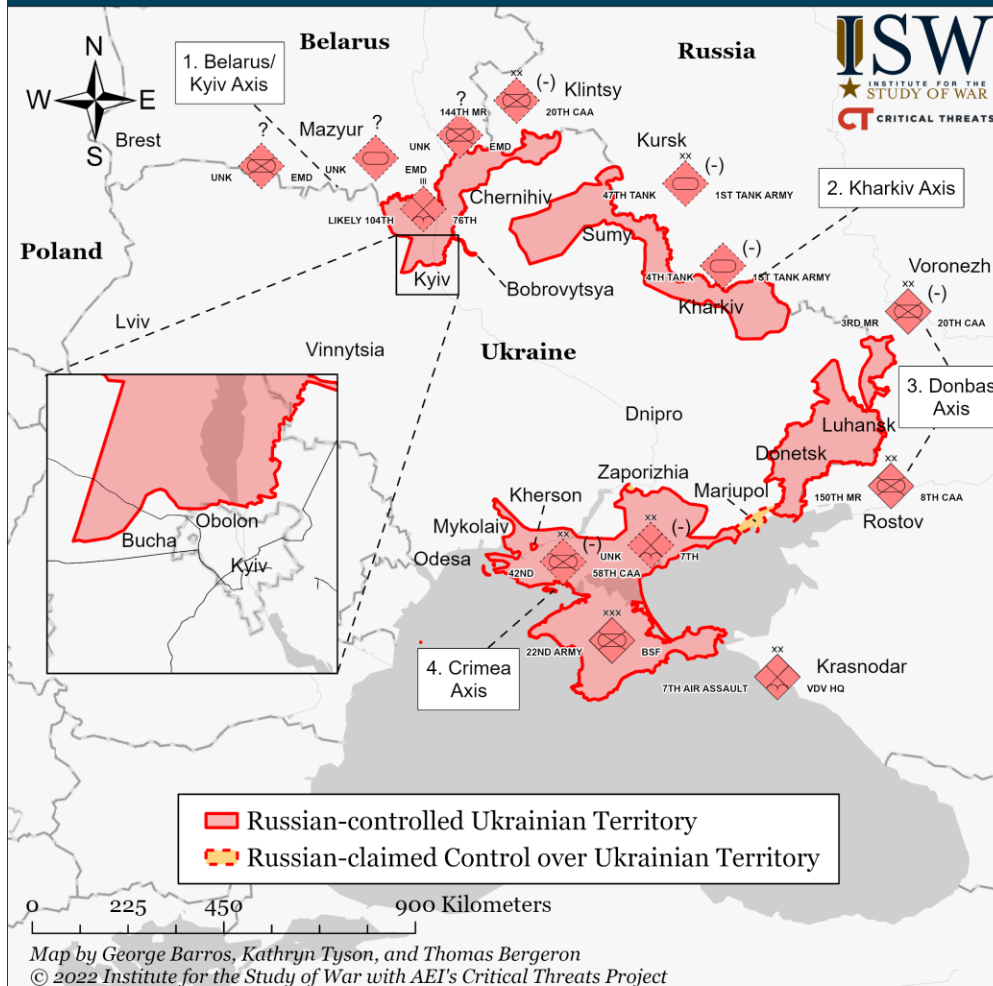
- [CORRECTION] Russian President Vladimir Putin likely moved Russia's nuclear alert status to their highest peacetime level on February 27, the second of four possible levels.
- The Kremlin admitted Russian casualties in Ukraine for the first time but announced an implausibly low number of killed or wounded.
- Ukraine combatted Russian information campaigns while the Kremlin continued censoring information in Russia.
- Anti-war protests in Russia continued on March 1 despite mass arrests and government censorship.
- European Union (EU) countries are set to expand SWIFT sanctions as more private companies suspend operations and services in Russia.
- NATO and EU countries continued providing military aid but reneged on promised fighter jets for Ukraine on March 1.
- Private companies and Western governments sanctioned Russian state-affiliated media to combat Russian disinformation and propaganda on March 1.
- European and Ukrainian leaders advanced efforts to quickly admit Ukraine to the EU on March 1.
- Russian forces are setting conditions to envelop Kyiv from the west and attempting to open a new axis of attack from the east that would let them encircle the capital. It is unclear if Russia has sufficient combat power to complete such an encirclement and hold it against Ukrainian counter-attacks.
- Russian forces will likely launch a renewed ground offensive to seize Kharkiv following the air/artillery/missile attack it has been conducting in the past 24 hours.
- Russian and Russian proxy forces will likely solidify the "land bridge" linking Rostov-on-Don with Crimea, allowing Russian forces to move more rapidly from Rostov to reinforce efforts further west.
- Russia's successful seizure of Kherson city may allow Russian forces to resume their interrupted drive toward Mykolayiv and Odesa.
- Belarusian forces have likely entered the war on Russia's side despite denials by the Belarusian president.

Key Events February 28, 4:00 pm EST – March 1, 4:00 pm EST

Military Events:

Russian forces are completing the reinforcement and resupply of their troops north and west of Kyiv and launching an envelopment of the capital likely aimed at encircling and ultimately capturing it. This effort will likely accelerate in the next 24-48 hours. Russian operations against Kyiv are Moscow's main effort. Russian troops are also undertaking three supporting efforts, one to seize Kharkiv, one to take Mariupol and secure the "land bridge" connecting Rostov-on-Don to Crimea, and one to secure Kherson and set conditions for a drive west toward Mykolayiv and Odesa. The three supporting operations are active, with the operation against Mariupol making the most progress in the last 24 hours. **Russian troops claim to have encircled Mariupol and have reportedly entered the city of Kherson in the south.** Russian forces are receiving needed supplies and reinforcements that may facilitate much more rapid and effective operations in the coming 24-72 hours. The Russian effort around Kyiv remains poorly organized, however, with elements of many different battalions combined into what seem to be ad hoc groupings rather than operating under standing regiment or brigade headquarters. The initial errors in the Russian force composition and organization in Belarus and western Russia that ISW has previously reported on, which contributed to Russian logistical and operational failures around Kyiv, will be difficult to remedy quickly and will likely continue to cause friction and reduce the effectiveness of Russian operations even as supply issues are addressed and reinforcements come into the fight. It remains too early to evaluate the likely effective combat power the added Russian troops will bring.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 1, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Confirmed Russian units in the past 24 hours:

Elements of the 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) attacked Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast.

Elements of the 7th Airborne Division attacked Kherson City.

Elements of the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) attacked Irpin, Kyiv Oblast.

Elements of the 5th Tank Brigade of the 36th CAA of the Eastern Military District attacked Chernihiv Oblast.

Ukraine Conflict Update 11

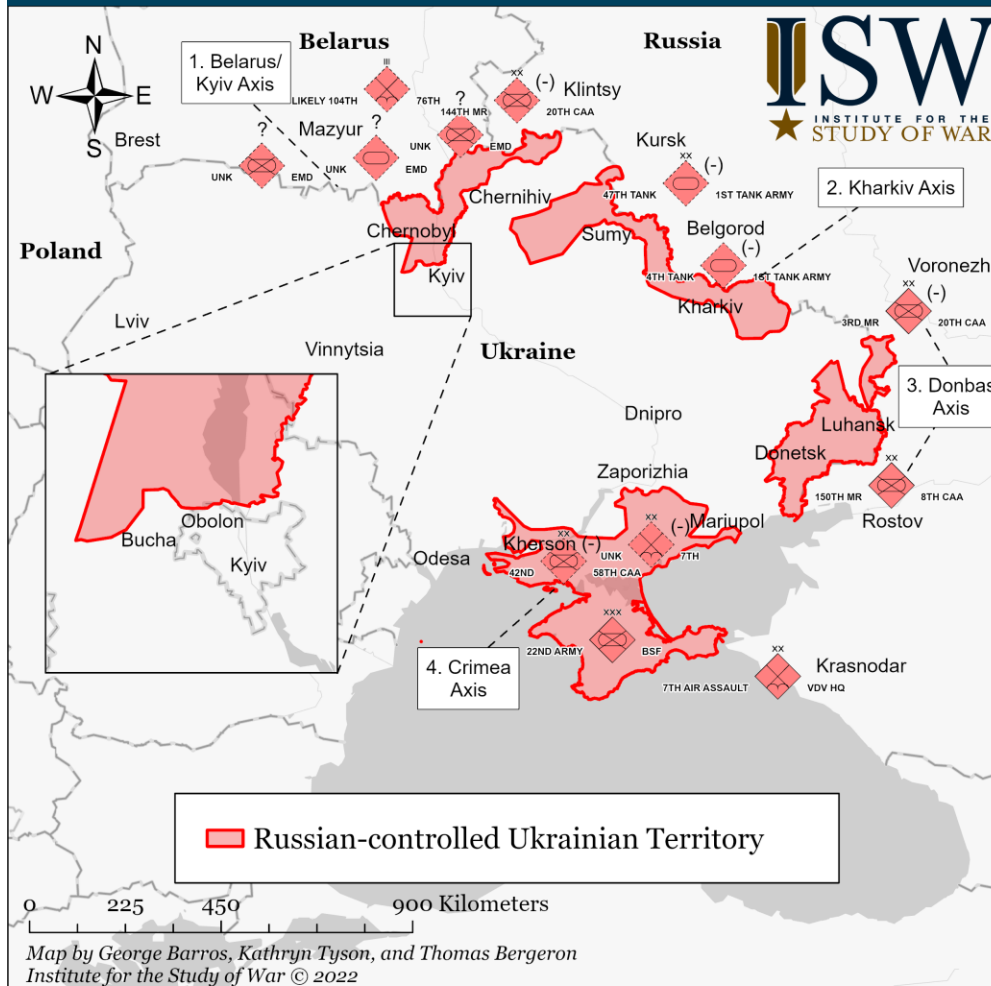
[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

Key Takeaways February 28

- Russian forces increasingly targeted Ukrainian airfields and logistics centers on February 28, particularly in western Ukraine. Russia likely seeks to ground the Ukrainian air force and interdict the ability of Western states to resupply the Ukrainian military.
- Russia deployed additional heavy forces and artillery that it has so far failed to employ in assaults on Kyiv to the city's western approach on February 27-28. Russian forces will likely launch a renewed assault on western Kyiv on March 1.
- The Kremlin largely froze trade in foreign currencies and raised interest rates to halt the Ruble's freefall on February 28 due to the imposition of Western sanctions. The ruble fell over 30 percent against the dollar on February 28.
- The United States and its European allies levied further sanctions targeting the Russian Central Bank, throttling Russia's ability to prop up the ruble. Tax havens Switzerland and Monaco joined European Union (EU) sanctions, contravening the Swiss tradition of neutrality.
- NATO and EU countries prepared potential sanctions targeting Belarus following a sham constitutional referendum and intelligence suggesting Belarus could join the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- The first round of Russian-Ukrainian negotiations in Gomel, Belarus, failed to yield any agreement.
- EU and Ukrainian leaders strengthened their push for quick Ukrainian admittance to the European Union.
- NATO and the EU announced more financial and military equipment support to Ukraine, including an EU package amounting to over 500 million euros of military aid.
- Russian shelling of civilian areas in eastern Ukraine and worsening food shortages across the country will likely exacerbate the refugee crisis across Ukraine and into Eastern Europe.
- Russian forces began using heavy artillery against central Kharkiv on February 28, indicating a dangerous inflection in Russian operations as the Kremlin chooses to use air and artillery assets it previously held in reserve.
- Russian forces resumed limited advances in northeastern Ukraine on February 28 after an operational pause on February 26-27.
- Russian and proxy forces resumed assaults on Ukrainian forces defending Mariupol from the east and deployed additional artillery and anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) assets to the Mariupol front line on February 28.
- Russian and Belarusian forces may be preparing for an additional line of advance from Belarus into western Ukraine.
- Russian successes in southern Ukraine are the most dangerous and threaten to unhinge Ukraine's successful defenses and rearguard actions to the north and northeast.
- Russian troops are facing growing morale and logistics issues, predictable consequences of the poor planning, coordination, and execution of attacks along Ukraine's northern border.
- Russian officials downplayed Russian President Vladimir Putin's February 27 decision to place Russian nuclear and missile forces on their highest combat readiness orders. The United States declined to change its own alert levels.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 28, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Confirmed Russian units in the past 24 hours:

Elements of the 104th Airborne Regiment of the 76th Airborne Division attacked Kyiv Oblast likely from Gomel, Belarus.

Elements of the 26th Tank Regiment of the 47th Tank Division of the 1st Tank Army attacked Sumy Oblast from Kursk, Russia.

Elements of the 96th Separate Reconnaissance Brigade and elements of the 423rd Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 4th Tank Division of the 1st Tank Army attacked Kharkiv Oblast from Belgorod, Russia.

Elements of the 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 6th Combined Arms Army (CAA) attacked Kharkiv Oblast from Belgorod, Russia.

Elements of the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 2nd CAA attacked Chernivtsi Oblast from Bryansk, Russia.

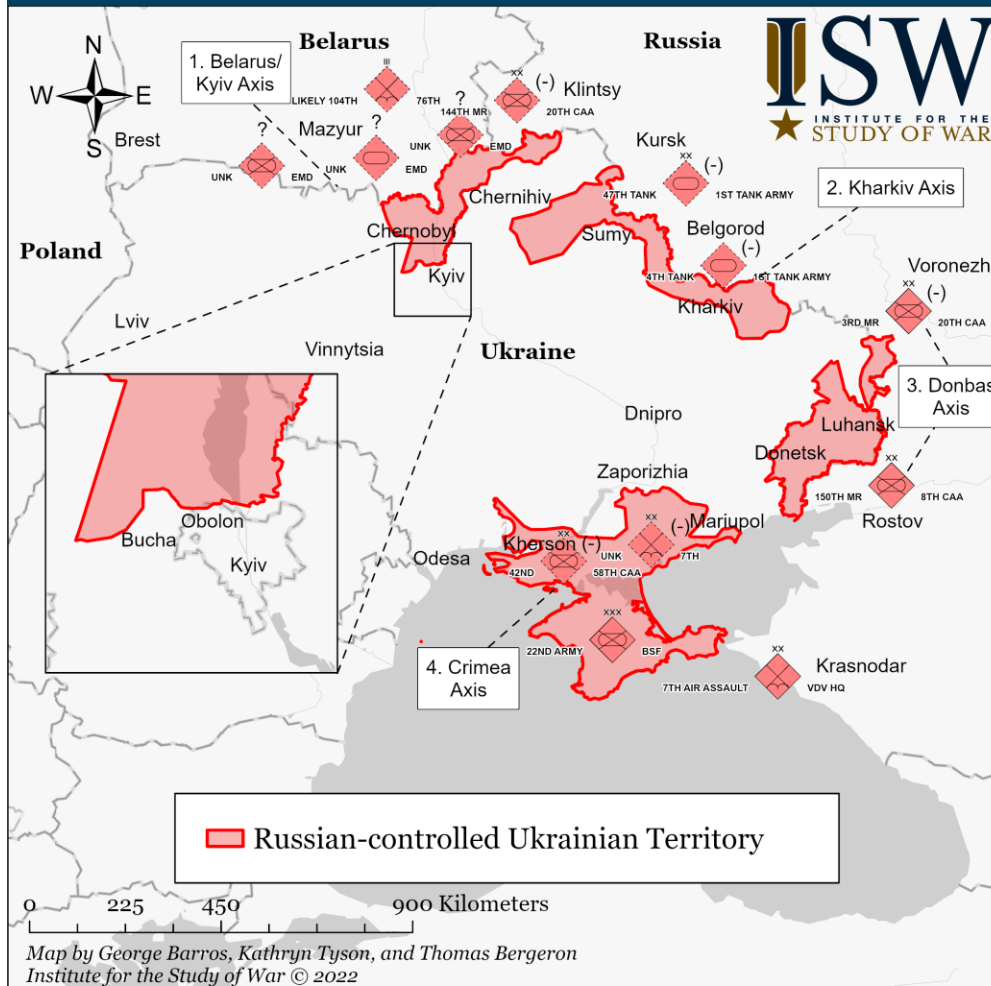
Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 28, 2022

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

The Russian military is reorganizing its military efforts in an attempt to remedy poor planning and execution based on erroneous assumptions about Ukrainians' will and ability to resist. Russian operations around Kyiv remain limited as logistics and reinforcements arrive but will likely resume in greater strength in the next 24 hours. Ukrainian military leaders say that they have used the pause to strengthen Kyiv's defenses and prepare to defend their capital in depth. The Ukrainian military likely cannot prevent Russian forces from enveloping or encircling Kyiv if the Russians send enough combat power to do so, but likely can make Russian efforts to gain control of the city itself extremely costly and possibly unsuccessful.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 28, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Ukraine Conflict Update 10
[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team
Key Takeaways February 27

- Russian President Vladimir Putin put Russia's nuclear and strategic missile forces, described as "deterrence forces," on their highest alert status in response to "aggressive statements in the West" on February 27.
- Russian forces likely conducted an operational pause on the Kyiv axis on February 26-27 to deploy additional supplies and forces forward. Russian forces will likely resume offensive operations against Kyiv in the next 24 hours.
- Russian forces largely conducted an operational pause on their current broad front of advance between Chernihiv and Kharkiv. Ukrainian forces continue to delay and inflict losses on the Russian advance but will likely not be able to halt further advances if the Kremlin commits additional reserves.
- Russian forces entered the city of Kharkiv for the first time on February 27 but remain unlikely to take the city without the use of heavier firepower.
- Russian forces have encircled Mariupol from the west and began initial assaults on the city. Russian forces have not made any major territorial gains from the east in Donbas after four days of fighting. Russian forces likely intend to pin Ukrainian forces in place on the line of contact to enable Russian forces breaking out of Crimea to isolate them.
- Russian forces continued to advance north from Crimea towards Zaporzhia and, in conjunction with Russian advances on Mariupol, threaten to isolate Ukrainian forces on the line of contact in Donbas if they do not withdraw.
- Russian forces failed to seize Kherson after Ukrainian counterattacks reclaimed it on February 26. An unknown concentration of Russian forces remains on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River and threatens Mikolayiv, however.
- Russian successes in southern Ukraine are the most dangerous and threaten to unhinge Ukraine's successful defenses and rearguard actions to the north and northeast.
- The Belarusian government is setting information and legal conditions to justify a Belarusian offensive against Ukraine and the imminent deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus as of February 27.
- US and allied sanctions against Russian banking will likely crush Russian foreign currency reserves, depleting the value of the ruble and risking Russian hyperinflation.
- The European Union announced direct military aid to Ukraine for the first time in EU history on February 27.
- Germany announced a dramatic reorientation of its foreign policy to mitigate the threat that Russia poses to Germany and its allies. Germany will prioritize military spending and energy independence despite short-term economic costs.

Russia-Ukraine Warning Update: Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 27

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

The Russian military has likely recognized that its initial expectations that limited Russian attacks would cause the collapse of Ukrainian resistance have failed and is recalibrating accordingly. The Russian military is moving additional combat resources toward Ukraine and establishing more reliable and effective logistics arrangements to support what is likely a larger, harder, and more protracted conflict than it had originally prepared for. The tide of the war could change rapidly in Russia's favor if the Russian military has correctly identified its failings and addresses them promptly, given the overwhelming advantage in net combat power Moscow enjoys. Ukrainian morale and combat effectiveness remain extremely high, however, and Russian forces confront the challenge of likely intense urban warfare in the coming days.

Russian forces largely conducted an operational pause on February 26-27 but will likely resume offensive operations and begin using greater air and artillery support in the coming days. Russian airborne and special forces troops are engaged in urban warfare in northwestern Kyiv, but Russian mechanized forces are not yet in the capital. Russian forces conducted limited attacks on the direct

approaches to Kyiv on both banks of the Dnipro River, but largely paused offensive operations in northeastern Ukraine. Russian forces likely paused to recalibrate their – to date largely unsuccessful – approach to offensive operations in northern Ukraine and deploy additional reinforcements and air assets to the front lines.

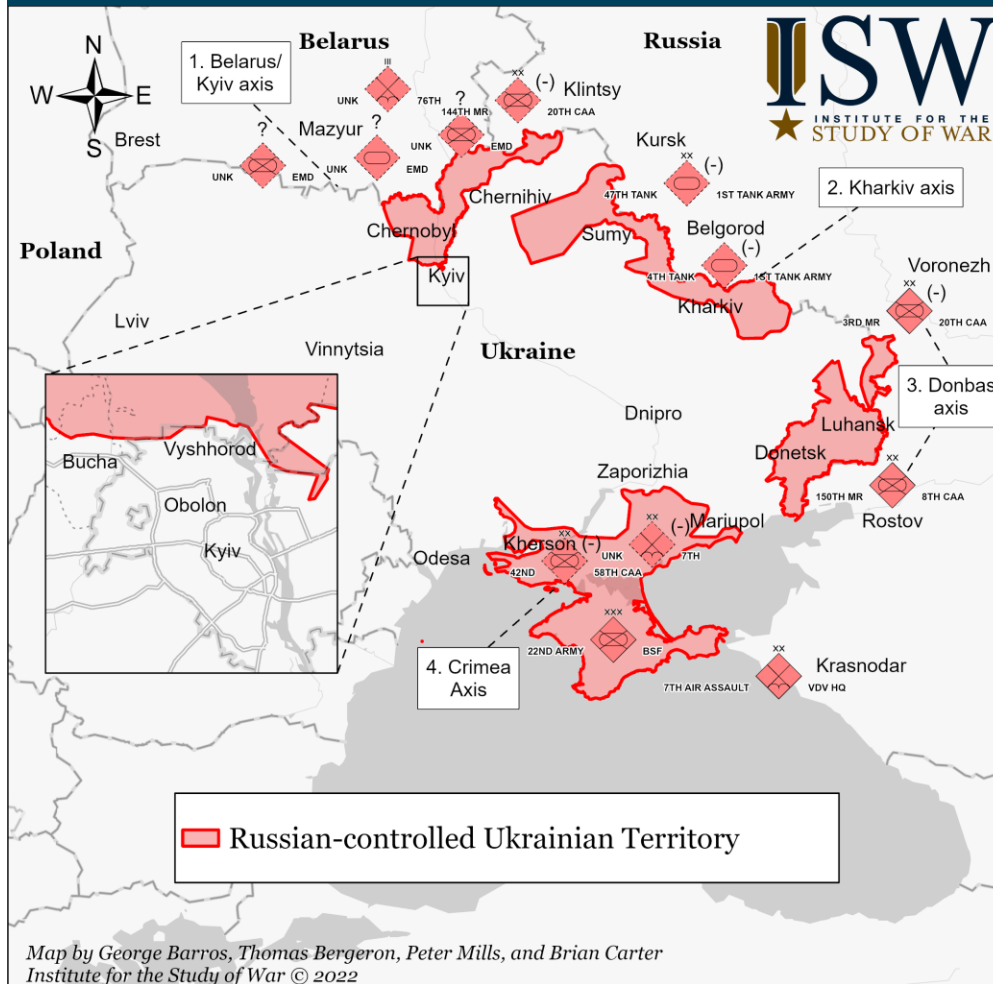
Russian forces from Crimea slowly pushed north toward Zaporizhzhia and the southeastern bend of the Dnipro River and east along the Azov Sea coast toward Mariupol on February 27. Russian forces advancing east from Crimea began initial assaults against Mariupol the morning of February 27. These advances risk cutting off the large concentrations of Ukrainian forces still defending the former line of contact between unoccupied Ukraine and occupied Donbas.

Ukrainian resistance remains remarkably effective and Russian operations especially on the Kyiv axis have been poorly coordinated and executed, leading to significant Russian failures on that axis and at Kharkiv. Russian forces remain much larger and more capable than Ukraine's conventional military, however, and Russian advances in southern Ukraine may threaten to unhinge the defense of Kyiv and northeastern Ukraine if they continue unchecked.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces likely conducted an operational pause on the Kyiv axis on February 26-27 to deploy additional supplies and forces forward. Russian forces will likely resume offensive operations against Kyiv in the next 24 hours. Russian troops have not yet committed heavy armor and artillery forces to fighting in Kyiv and will likely need to do so to take the city.
- Russian forces largely conducted an operational pause on their current broad front of advance between Chernihiv and Kharkiv. Ukrainian forces continue to delay and inflict losses on the Russian advance but will likely not be able to halt further advances if the Kremlin commits additional reserves.
- Russian forces entered the city of Kharkiv for the first time on February 27 but remain unlikely to take the city without the use of heavier firepower.
- Russian forces have encircled Mariupol from the west and began initial assaults on the city. Russian forces have not made any major territorial gains from the east in Donbas after four days of fighting. Russian forces likely intend to pin Ukrainian forces in place on the line of contact to enable Russian forces breaking out of Crimea to isolate them.
- Russian forces continued to advance north towards Zaporizhzhia and, in conjunction with Russian advances on Mariupol, threaten to isolate Ukrainian forces on the line of contact in Donbas if they do not withdraw.
- Russian forces failed to seize Kherson after Ukrainian counterattacks reclaimed it on February 26. An unknown concentration of Russian forces remains on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River and threatens Mikolayiv, however.
- Russian successes in southern Ukraine are the most dangerous and threaten to unhinge Ukraine's successful defenses and rearguard actions to the north and northeast.
- Russian troops are facing growing morale and logistics issues, predictable consequences of the poor planning, coordination, and execution of attacks along Ukraine's northern border.
- Russian air and missile strikes targeted a Ukrainian airbase in western Ukraine to ground the remaining Ukrainian air force the night of February 26-27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported Russian forces conducted 5 air and 16 missile strikes across Ukraine from midnight to 1pm local time, February 27.[1] Russian strikes targeted the Ivano-Frankivsk airfield, home to Ukraine's 114th Tactical Aviation Brigade.[2] Russian forces continue to refrain from using the full array of air and missile capabilities available to them. Russian forces will likely increase their use of fires in coming days to overcome heavier-than-anticipated Ukrainian resistance, however.
- Russian forces in northeast Ukraine continue to face morale and supply issues, likely due to poor planning and ad hoc command structures, as ISW previously forecasted.[3] The Ukrainian General Staff additionally reported Russian forces are "experiencing an acute shortage of fuel and food" and are increasingly using Belarusian rail networks to supply Russian forces in Ukraine.[4]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 27, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Ukraine Conflict Update 9

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

February 26, 9:00 pm EST

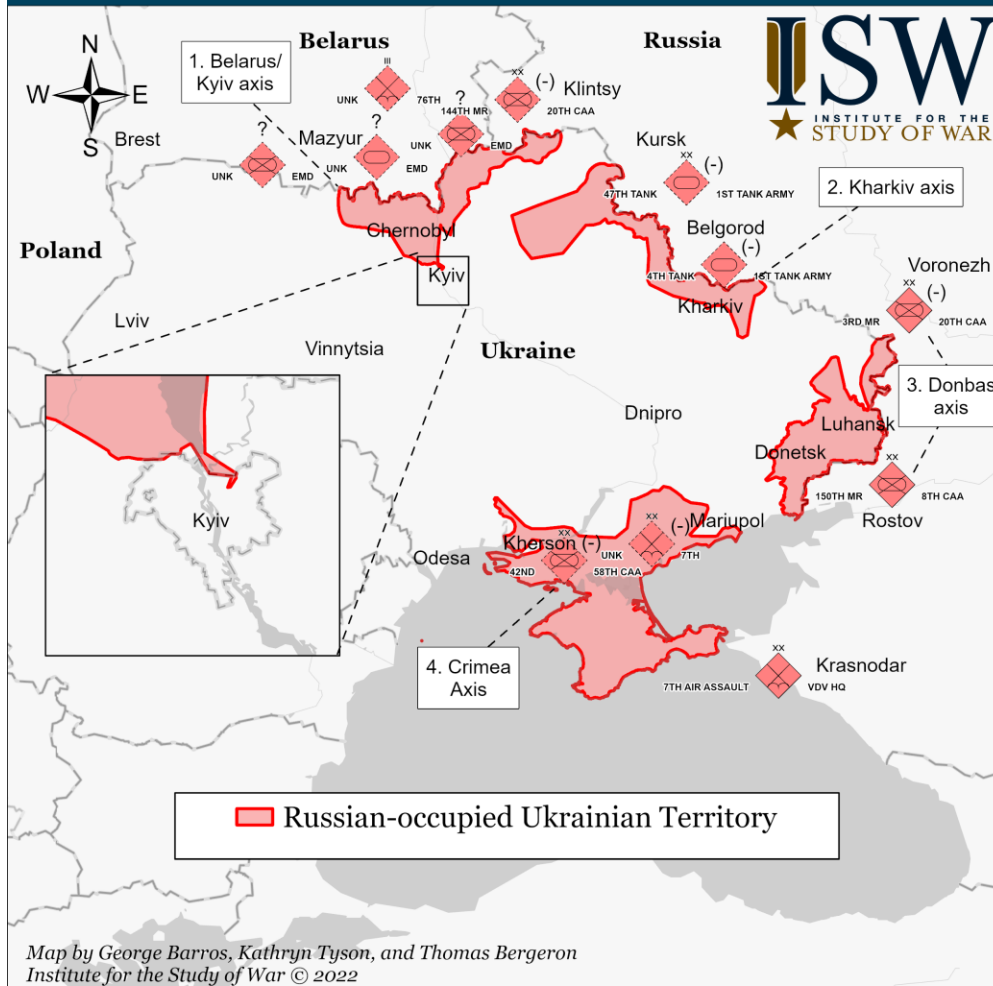
Key Takeaways February 26

- Russia has failed to encircle and isolate Kyiv with mechanized and airborne attacks as it had clearly planned to do. Russian forces are now engaging in more straightforward mechanized

drives into Kyiv along a narrow front on the west bank of the Dnipro River and on a broad front to the northeast.

- Russian forces temporarily abandoned efforts to seize Chernihiv and Kharkiv to the northeast and east of Kyiv and are bypassing those cities to continue their drive on Kyiv. Failed Russian attacks against both cities were poorly designed and executed and encountered more determined and effective resistance than Russia likely expected.
- Russian successes in southern Ukraine are the most dangerous and threaten to unhinge Ukraine's successful defenses and rearguard actions to the north and northeast.
- Russian forces in eastern Ukraine remain focused on pinning the large concentration of Ukrainian forces arrayed along the former line of contact in the east, likely to prevent them from interfering with Russian drives on Kyiv and to facilitate their encirclement and destruction.
- Ukrainian forces retook the critical city of Kherson and Russian forces halted their drive on Odesa. Some Russian troops remain west of the Dnipro River and are advancing on Mykolaiv, but the main axes of advance have shifted to the north and east toward Zaporizhzhia and Mariupol respectively.
- Russian forces have taken the critical city of Berdyansk from the west, threatening to encircle Mariupol with Russian forces in Donbas attacking Mariupol from the east, likely to pin defenders in the city.
- Russian troops are facing growing morale and logistics issues, predictable consequences of the poor planning, coordination, and execution of attacks along Ukraine's northern border.
- The United States, Canada, and European allies removed select Russian banks from the SWIFT global financial network and agreed to additional measures that could significantly increase economic pressure on Russia.
- The United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom facilitated a significant expansion of NATO countries' lethal aid shipments to Ukraine since the Russian invasion began.
- NATO countries began contributing forces to NATO Response Force (NRF) operations in Eastern Europe, reinforcing NATO's eastern flank.
- Russia's invasion of Ukraine is set to displace millions of Ukrainians internally and throughout eastern Europe; at least 150,000 Ukrainians have fled the country as of February 26 as urban fighting intensifies.
- Kremlin censors increased crackdowns on independent media amid growing Russian opposition to the war.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 26, 2022, 1:00 PM EST



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment: February 26, 2022
[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

February 26, 3:00 pm EST

Russian forces' main axes of advance in the last 24 hours focused on Kyiv, northeastern Ukraine, and southern Ukraine. Russian airborne and special forces troops are engaged in urban warfare in northwestern Kyiv, but Russian mechanized forces are not yet in the capital. Russian forces from Crimea have changed their primary axes of advance from a presumed drive toward Odesa to focus on pushing north toward Zaporizhzhia and the southeastern bend of the Dnipro River and east along the Azov Sea coast toward Mariupol. These advances risk cutting off the large concentrations of Ukrainian forces still defending the former line of contact between unoccupied Ukraine and occupied Donbas. **Ukrainian leaders may soon face the painful decision of ordering the withdrawal of those forces and the ceding of more of eastern Ukraine or allowing much of Ukraine's uncommitted conventional combat power to be encircled and destroyed.** There are no indications as yet of whether the Ukrainian government is considering this decision point.

Ukrainian resistance remains remarkably effective and Russian operations especially on the Kyiv axis have been poorly coordinated and executed, leading to significant Russian failures on that axis and at Kharkiv. Russian forces remain much larger and more capable than Ukraine's conventional military, however, and Russian advances in southern Ukraine may threaten to unhinge the defense of Kyiv and northeastern Ukraine if they continue unchecked.

Key Takeaways:

- **Russia has failed to encircle and isolate Kyiv with the combination of mechanized and airborne attacks as it had clearly planned to do. Russian forces are now engaging in more straightforward mechanized drives into the capital along a narrow front along the west bank of the Dnipro River and toward Kyiv from a broad front to the northeast.**
- **Russian forces have temporarily abandoned failed efforts to seize Chernihiv and Kharkiv to the northeast and east of Kyiv and are bypassing those cities to continue their drive on Kyiv. Russian attacks against both cities appear to have been poorly designed and executed and to have encountered more determined and effective Ukrainian resistance than they expected.**
- **Russian movements in eastern Ukraine remain primarily focused on pinning the large concentration of Ukrainian conventional forces arrayed along the former line of contact in the east, likely to prevent them from interfering with Russian drives on Kyiv and to facilitate their encirclement and destruction.**
- **Russian forces coming north from Crimea halted their drive westward toward Odesa, and Ukrainian forces have retaken the critical city of Kherson. Some Russian troops remain west of the Dnipro River and are advancing on Mikolayiv, but the main axes of advance have shifted to the north and east toward Zaporizhzhia and Mariupol respectively.**
- **Russian forces have taken the critical city of Berdyansk from the west, threatening to encircle Mariupol even as Russian forces based in occupied Donbas attack Mariupol from the east, likely to pin defenders in the city as they are encircled.**
- **Russian successes in southern Ukraine are the most dangerous and threaten to unhinge Ukraine's successful defenses and rearguard actions to the north and northeast.**
- **Russian troops are facing growing morale and logistics issues, predictable consequences of the poor planning, coordination, and execution of attacks along Ukraine's northern border.**

[Ukraine Conflict Update 8](#)

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

February 25, 9:00 pm EST

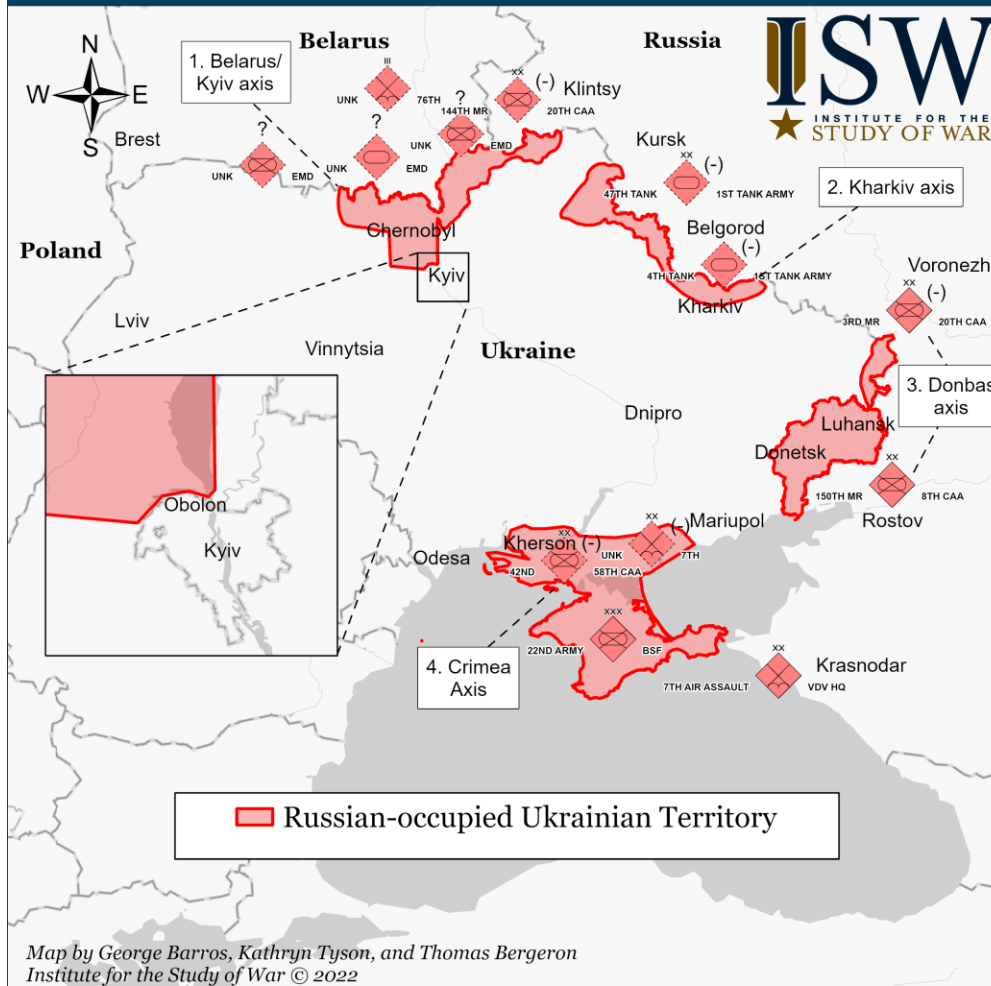
Kremlin officials and Russian government media advanced the dual narratives that Ukrainian "nationalists" are the only Ukrainians fighting and that Russian forces are easily succeeding in Ukraine throughout coverage on February 25 to counteract the growing unpopularity of the war in Russia. TASS falsely claimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) forces are advancing toward the administrative borders of Donetsk Oblast and Luhansk Oblast late on February 25.[1] Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova falsely claimed Russian forces are only

striking Ukrainian military infrastructure, not Ukrainian cities or civilians. Zakharova also claimed that Ukrainian “nationalists” threaten ethnic Russians with “direct reprisals” in Ukraine.[2] Russian domestic media additionally amplified a Russian Defense Ministry announcement claiming Ukrainian nationalist battalions are destroying bridges and civilian infrastructure to prevent other Ukrainians from surrendering.[3] Russian TV channels reported that the West and Ukraine are artificially insinuating panic across all Ukrainian cities to amplify mobilization and mass nationalist revolts by supplying Ukrainian civilians with weapons.[4] Russian Defense Ministry Spokesperson Major General Igor Konashenkov claimed that Russian forces neutralized 11 Ukrainian military aircraft, 18 tanks and armored vehicles, and 211 military infrastructure facilities but did not mention Russian losses.[5] Konashenkov also claimed that Russia’s seizure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant prevented “Ukrainian nationalists” from using the power plant to conduct a “nuclear provocation.”[6] Kremlin media amplified false Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claims that the Ukrainian 36th and 53rd Brigades “laid down their arms.”[7]

Key Takeaways February 25

- **Russian forces entered major Ukrainian cities—including Kyiv and Kherson—for the first time and carried out additional air and missile strikes on military and civilian targets.**
- **Russian forces entered the outskirts of Kyiv on the west bank of the Dnipro River as Russian sabotage groups in civilian clothing reportedly moved into downtown Kyiv.**
- **Ukrainian forces have successfully slowed Russian troops on the east bank of the Dnipro, forcing them to bypass the city of Chernihiv after stout resistance. Russian airborne forces have concentrated in southeastern Belarus, likely for use along the Chernihiv-bypass axis toward Kyiv in the next 24 hours.**
- **Russian forces will likely envelop Kharkiv in the next 24 hours after failing to enter the city through frontal assaults on February 24-25.**
- **Russian forces have achieved little success through frontal assaults or envelopments against Ukrainian forces in Donbas but may not have intended to do more than pin Ukrainian forces in the east.**
- **North of Crimea, Russian forces fully captured Kherson and are likely on the verge of seizing Melitopol in the east. Unconfirmed reports indicate that Russian forces bypassed Kherson earlier and headed directly for Mykolaiv and Odessa.**
- **Russian forces may be assembling in Stolín, Belarus, to open a new line of advance against Rivne in western Ukraine.**
- **Western intelligence officials told *CNN* on February 25 that Russian President Vladimir Putin intends to invade all of Ukraine and could install a pro-Kremlin regime within days.**
- **Russian opposition groups and citizens opposing the Russian war in Ukraine may be laying the foundations of a coordinated anti-war movement that will be unlikely to alter Putin’s decision making but will likely provoke harsher domestic crackdowns, further eroding Putin’s domestic popularity.**
- **The United States, United Kingdom, and European Union expanded their sanctions on Russia to target Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on February 25, but sanctions to sever Russia from SWIFT remain unlikely.**
- **NATO activated its 40,000-troop Response Force for the first time ever on February 25 to reinforce NATO’s eastern flank in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.**
- **The International Criminal Court (ICC) announced possible investigations into alleged Russian war crimes amid Russian denials.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 25, 2022, 1:00 PM EST



Confirmed Russian Units:

Elements of the 76th Airborne Division (likely at least a regiment) landed in Gomel, Belarus, on February 24 because Russian forces failed to capture the Hostomel Air Base on February 24. These elements could attack along the Belarus / Kyiv axis or could deploy to Hostomel.

Elements of 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 6th Combined Arms Army attacked Kharkiv Oblast from Belgorod, Russia, on February 24.

Two transport companies and two battalion tactical groups of the 126th Coastal Defense Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet attacked Kavkovka, Kherson, from Crimea on February 24.

Elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division of the 58th Combined Arms attacked Kherson from Crimea on February 24.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment: February 25, 2022

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

February 25, 3:00 pm EST

Russian forces entered major Ukrainian cities—including Kyiv and Kherson—for the first time on February 25. Russian forces' main axes of advance focused on Kyiv (successfully isolating the city on both banks of the Dnipro River). Russian military operations along Ukraine's northern border have been less well-planned, organized, and conducted than those emanating from Crimea. They have also been less successful so far. The divergence in performance likely arises in part from differences in the composition and organization of the Russian ground forces elements in the Western Military District and Belarus (to Ukraine's north) and Southern Military District and Black Sea Fleet (to its south and east), as ISW has previously observed.[1] Determined and well-organized Ukrainian resistance around Kyiv and Kharkiv has also played an important role in preventing the Russian military from advancing with the speed and success for which it had reportedly planned.[2] The Russian military has deployed additional forces to southeastern Belarus, likely beyond those Moscow had planned to use against Ukraine, to offset these problems and challenges. Russian forces remain much larger and more capable than Ukraine's conventional military, however. Russia will likely defeat Ukrainian regular military forces and secure their territorial objectives at some point in the coming days or weeks if Putin is determined to do so and willing to pay the cost in blood and treasure.

Key Takeaways

- Russian forces entered the outskirts of Kyiv on the west bank of the Dnipro on February 25. Russian sabotage groups in civilian clothes are reportedly active in downtown Kyiv.
- Russian forces have so far failed to enter Kyiv's eastern outskirts. Ukrainian forces have successfully slowed Russian troops, which have temporarily abandoned the failed attempt to take the city of Chernihiv and are instead bypassing it.
- Elements of the Russian 76th VDV (Airborne) division have concentrated in southeastern Belarus likely for use along the Chernihiv-bypass axis toward Kyiv in the next 24 hours.
- Russian forces will likely envelop Kharkiv in the next 24 hours after failing to enter the city through frontal assaults on February 24.
- Russian forces have achieved little success on frontal assaults or envelopments against Ukrainian forces in Donbas but may not have intended to do more than pin Ukrainian forces in the east.
- North of Crimea, Russian forces fully captured Kherson and are likely on the verge of seizing Melitopol in the east. Unconfirmed reports indicate that Russian forces had bypassed Kherson earlier and headed directly for Mykolaiv and Odessa.
- Russian forces may be assembling in Stoln, Belarus, to open a new line of advance against Rivne in western Ukraine.

[Ukraine Conflict Update 7](#)

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

February 24, 9:00 pm EST

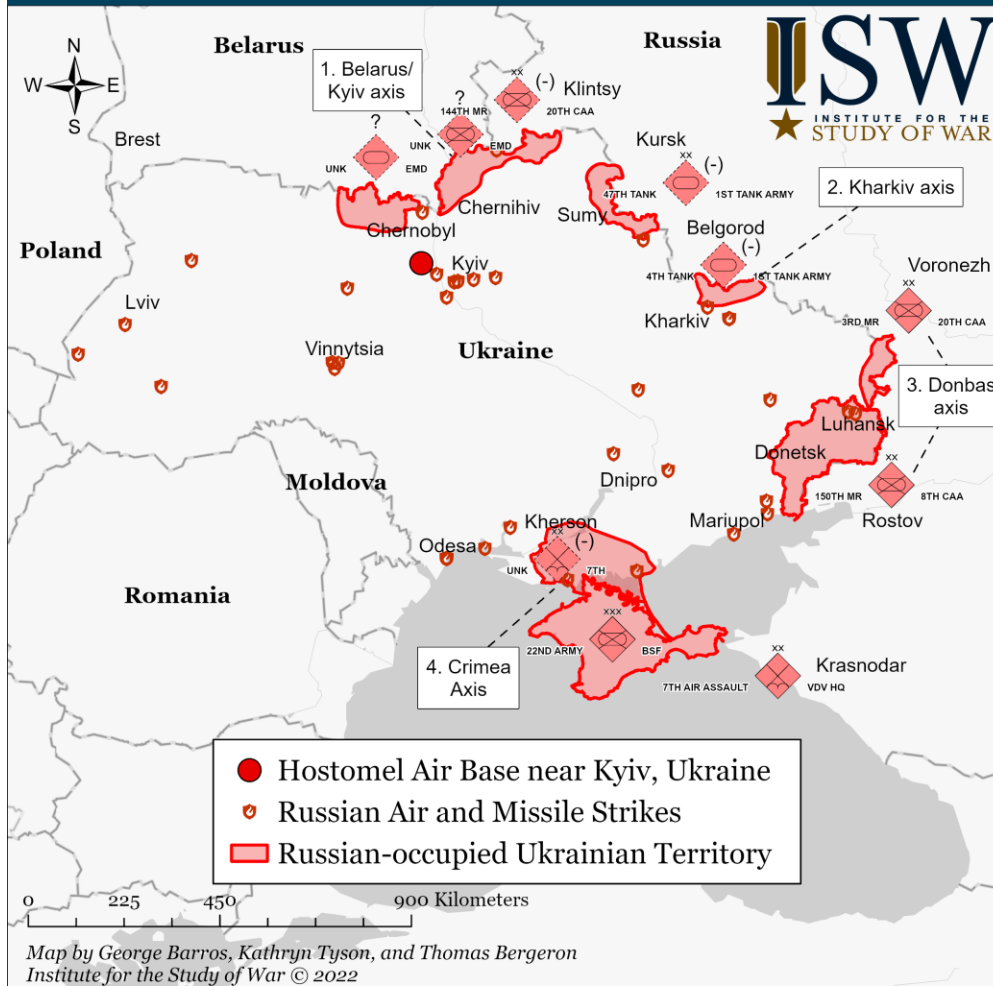
Key Takeaways February 24

- **Ukrainian forces are successfully slowing Russian offensives on all axes of advance other than a Russian breakout from the Crimean Peninsula.**
- **Russian failure to ground the Ukrainian air force or cripple Ukrainian command and control is likely enabling these initial Ukrainian successes.**
- **Russian forces remain much larger and more capable than Ukraine's conventional military and Putin is likely to defeat Ukrainian regular military forces and secure his territorial objectives in the coming days or weeks if he is willing to pay the price.**
- **Ukrainian forces defeated a Russian operation to isolate Kyiv from the west, recapturing the Hostomel military airport from Russian VDV (Airborne) troops after several counterattacks throughout the day.**
- **Russian forces are rapidly advancing north from Crimea, securing Kherson city. Their deepest penetration to date is about 60 kilometers.**
- **Russian forces are advancing on Kyiv from Belarus on both sides of the Dnipro River, but have been temporarily halted east of the Dnipro at Chernihiv.**

- Russian forces likely seek to cut off Ukrainian troops on the line of contact in Donbas using an envelopment behind the Ukrainian front lines through Luhansk Oblast. Russian frontal assaults have taken little territory in Donetsk and Luhansk at this time.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin seeks to obfuscate to Russian citizens that he launched a large-scale invasion of Ukraine aimed at regime change, likely to mitigate blowback from a Russian population unprepared for a major war.
- The United States and its European allies approved sweeping new sanctions against Russia's economic, military, technological, and energy sectors but attempted to mitigate the possible consequences of those sanctions for US and EU energy markets.
- US and NATO allies deployed additional forces to NATO's eastern flank to deter a spillover from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- International organizations warned of a looming humanitarian crisis as states bordering Ukraine deployed troops to their borders to prepare for a possible influx of Ukrainian refugees.
- The Kremlin detained hundreds of civilians across Russia for protesting the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

[Click here to expand the map below.](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 24, 2022, 2:00 PM EST



Confirmed Russian Units:

Unidentified elements of the 423rd Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 4th Tank Division, 1st Tank Army, attacked Kharkiv Oblast from Belgorod, Russia.

A reconnaissance platoon of the 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 41st Combined Arms Army attacked Chernihiv Oblast from Bryansk, Russia.

Unidentified elements, likely of the 7th Airborne Division and likely reinforced with 22nd Army Corps and 58th Combined Arms Army elements, attacked Kherson Oblast from Crimea.

Unidentified airborne elements, likely of the 31st Air Assault Brigade, attacked the Antonov Airport outside Kyiv.

Russia-Ukraine Warning Update: Initial Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

February 24, 3:00 pm EST

Russian President Vladimir Putin began a large-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24 likely aimed at full regime change and the occupation of Ukraine. His claimed objective to “demilitarize” and “de-nazify” Ukraine is a transparent cover for an unprovoked war of aggression to occupy a neighboring state. Putin and Kremlin media continue to deny that the Russian invasion is a war, instead describing it as a special military operation. Putin’s messaging is likely aimed at a domestic Russian audience, which the Kremlin has not fully prepared for the costs of a war against Ukraine. Russian officials and state media have been denying and mocking Western warnings of the impending Russian invasion for months and as recently as February 23. Russian forces remain much larger and more capable than Ukraine’s conventional military. Russia will likely defeat Ukrainian regular military forces and secure their territorial objectives at some point in the coming days or weeks if Putin is determined to do so and willing to pay the cost in blood and treasure.

Key Takeaways

- Ukrainian forces are successfully slowing Russian offensives on all axes of advance other than a Russian breakout from the Crimean Peninsula. Russian failure to ground the Ukrainian air force or cripple Ukrainian command and control is likely enabling these initial Ukrainian successes.
- Ukrainian forces are contesting the Hostomel military airport, 20 km northwest of Kyiv, as of 9:30 pm local time. Russian VDV (Airborne) troops landed at Hostomel and have also failed to capture the Boryspil airport southeast of Kyiv. Ukraine’s contestation of the airport deprives Russian forces of any location to airlift forces onto Kyiv’s western flank overnight.
- Russian forces are rapidly advancing north from Crimea, securing Kherson city. Their deepest penetration to date is about 60 kilometers.
- Russian forces are advancing on Kyiv from Belarus on both sides of the Dnipro River. Russian forces secured the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (on the west bank) at 7:30 pm local time, but Ukrainian forces have slowed Russian advances east of the Dnipro at Chernihiv.
- Russian forces likely seek to cut off Ukrainian troops on the line of contact in Donbas using an envelopment behind the Ukrainian front lines through Luhansk Oblast. Russian frontal assaults have taken little territory in Donetsk and Luhansk at this time.

Russian military operations began with a short and incomplete air campaign on February 24 around 4:00 am local time targeting Ukrainian air defenses, supply depots, and airfields across unoccupied Ukraine. However, portions of the Ukrainian Air Force remain operational and Ukrainian command and control appears intact.

- US defense officials estimate initial strikes comprised over 100 missiles including a mix of short and medium-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and sea-launched missiles. An estimated 75 Russian bombers participated in the attack.
- Russia did not successfully ground the Ukrainian air force or cripple the Ukrainian armed forces, enabling several Ukrainian successes on February 24. ISW incorrectly forecasted that any Russian offensive would begin with a concentrated air and missile campaign to cripple Ukrainian command and control and infrastructure.
- The Russian failure to comprehensively strike key Ukrainian assets is a surprising break from expected Russian operations and has likely enabled stiffer Ukrainian defense. The Ukrainian military has shot down seven Russian aircraft and seven helicopters as of 8:00 pm local time, February 24.
- Russia has not demonstrated its full air and missile capabilities and will likely conduct further waves of strikes in the coming days aimed at degrading Ukraine’s command and control and ability to redeploy forces.

Ukraine Conflict Update 6

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

February 23, 2022 9:00 pm ET

This report was produced immediately before Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the “special military operation” against Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin will likely order Russian forces to deploy overtly into Russian proxy-controlled Ukrainian territory and to the line of contact with Ukrainian forces on February 24. Russia will likely invade unoccupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts shortly after that deployment. A Russian invasion of most of the rest of Ukraine could occur at the same time or shortly thereafter. The proxy leaders of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) formally asked Putin to deploy Russian forces into DNR and LNR territory on February 23. The DNR and LNR leadership also requested Russian assistance to gain control over the rest of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, which they illegally claim as rightfully theirs. Putin secured unlimited parliamentary approval to deploy Russian forces abroad for any purpose he chooses on February 22. A Russian deployment to the DNR and LNR would set conditions for successive or simultaneous Russian military operations to conquer the entire Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and large areas of Ukrainian territory.

Key Takeaways February 23

- The Russian proxy Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics formally asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to deploy Russian Armed Forces to Donbas, setting conditions for an immediate deployment of Russian ground forces at scale into Donbas and toward the line of contact.
- Satellite imagery and Western intelligence indicate an imminent full-scale invasion with additional Russian deployments to Belgorod near Kharkiv, northeastern Ukraine, and in Gomel, Belarus.
- Russian state TV implied that Ukraine does not have rights to sovereignty over most of its territory, setting information conditions for the Russian population to support a Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine.
- The United States forward-deployed additional forces to Europe to support NATO allies and deter Russian aggression.
- US and allied leaders canceled planned meetings with Russian officials due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.
- The European Union (EU) and the United States are likely leveraging Russia’s unprecedented aggression against Ukraine as a catalyst to transition the EU away from its current dependence on Russian natural gas.

Ukraine Conflict Update 5

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

February 22, 4:00 pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin set information conditions for a military operation against Ukraine at a moment of his choosing on February 22. Russia will likely commence military operations to seize additional territory in eastern Ukraine within the coming days. ISW published its [assessment of Russia’s likely immediate course of action](#) at 1:00 pm ET on February 22.

Key Takeaways February 22

- Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics as covering the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (provinces) and secured unrestricted formal parliamentary authorization to deploy Russian forces abroad on February 22, setting conditions for a further offensive against Ukraine.

- The US and its European allies defined Putin's recognition of the DNR and LNR as an invasion of Ukraine and imposed a first round of sanctions.
- Ukraine called for further sanctions on Russia and Western military support, stressing its readiness to resist further Russian aggression.
- Russia's allies declined to immediately recognize the DNR and LNR and Russia faced widespread international condemnation.
- The Russian stock market and Rouble plummeted as the Kremlin sought to reassure Russia's population that Russia can weather Western sanctions.
- The US redeployed existing forces in Europe to support Eastern European allies.

Russia-Ukraine Warning Update: Russia Likely to Pursue Phased Invasion of Unoccupied Ukrainian Territory

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

February 22, 2022 1:30pm EST

Russian President Vladimir Putin set information conditions for a military operation against Ukraine at a moment of his choosing on February 22. Russia will likely commence military operations to seize additional territory in eastern Ukraine within the coming days.

Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) as covering the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (provinces) in a speech on February 22. Considerable parts of those oblasts remain in Ukrainian control with the heavily fortified "line of contact" running through both. Ukraine will not cede its portions of the oblasts voluntarily, so Putin will need to seize them militarily to make good on his recognition of the DNR's and LNR's claims to them. He might delay such military operations to attempt to coerce Ukraine into making these or other concessions with the threat of attack hanging over it, but his speech on February 22 significantly increased the likelihood of a Russian military operation into unoccupied eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine Conflict Update 4

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

February 21, 2022 9:00pm EST

Russia recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) and is deploying troops to Donetsk and Luhansk the night of February 21, 2022. ISW published its [assessment of Russia's likely immediate course of action](#) at 3:30pm Eastern Time. Russian armed forces will likely attack Ukrainian forces at the line of contact to secure the portions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts not currently under DNR/LNR control, likely accompanied by an air/missile campaign against unoccupied Ukraine in the coming days. We assess that Russia will likely take a phased approach rather than immediately beginning with the full-scale invasion.

Key Takeaways February 21

- Russian troops began overtly deploying to occupied Donbas following Putin's recognition of the independence of Russia's proxy Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.
- Putin gave a maximalist speech denying Ukrainian sovereignty and its right to exist as an independent state, justifying further Russian offensive action and indicating the Kremlin is unlikely to stop in Donbas.
- The White House and Western states did not recognize Russia's overt deployment of troops into Ukraine as an "invasion" but condemned Putin's recognition of the DNR and LNR and announced limited sanctions.

- The Russian government falsely accused Ukrainian forces of attacking Russian territory for the first time in the current crisis, setting conditions for Russia to legitimize further military action against Ukraine.
- The United States warned the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of a Russian “kill list” of politicians and likely future dissidents for Russia to target during a Russian occupation of Ukraine.

Russia-Ukraine Warning Update: Russian Military

Operations in Southeastern Ukraine Imminent

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

ISW launched this update to capture the key inflection point of Russia recognizing the DNR and LNR, which immediately preceeded the overt deployment of Russian forces to those areas.

February 21, 2022, 3:30pm EST

By Frederick W. Kagan and Mason Clark with George Barros and Kateryna Stepanenko

Russia recognized the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) and signed treaties of “friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance” with them on February 21, 2022.[1] Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his decision in a lengthy speech on the same day. The text of these agreements has not been publicized as of this writing.[2] The Russian Duma will likely vote to authorize the use of Russian military force to occupy the republics, and Russian conventional forces will likely move to do so within the next 24-36 hours. Russian formal recognition of the republics will likely include recognizing all their territorial claims, which extend to the portions of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts still under Ukrainian control.

Ukraine Conflict Update 3

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

February 20, 5:30pm EST

Russia will likely attack Ukraine the week of February 21, 2022. The Kremlin has deployed sufficient military forces and set informational conditions to conduct offensive operations including limited incursions into unoccupied Ukraine, a comprehensive air and missile campaign, and large-scale mechanized drives on Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities.

Key Takeaways February 20

- Kremlin Spokesperson Peskov claimed Ukraine cannot and will not implement the Minsk II Accords, marking a significant change in Kremlin rhetoric that Russia could use as a pretext for further escalation.
- The Belarusian Defense Minister announced Russian troops deployed in Belarus will remain in the country after the conclusion of Russian-Belarusian exercises—enabling an indefinite Russian military presence in Belarus.
- Russia began testing its nuclear early warning system as part of ongoing exercises intended to deter any NATO response to Russian actions against Ukraine.
- French President Emmanuel Macron proposed a renewed ceasefire (unsuccessfully, as of publication) in Donbas in back-to-back phone calls with Putin and Zelensky.

- The Kremlin intensified its disinformation efforts to generate the false appearance of a Ukrainian genocide against Russians in Donbas through evacuation efforts and false claims of Ukrainian targeting of civilians.
- A CBS national security correspondent claimed the US has intelligence that Russian commanders already received direct orders to invade Ukraine, but no US official confirmed the claim.
- Turkish officials decried the further imposition of sanctions on Russia and refrained from condemning Russia's military buildup to retain its balancing relationship with the Kremlin.

Ukraine Conflict Update 2

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

February 19, 7:00pm EST

Russia will likely attack Ukraine before February 21, 2022, as we discuss [here](#). The Kremlin has deployed sufficient military forces and set informational conditions to conduct offensive operations including limited incursions into unoccupied Ukraine, a comprehensive air and missile campaign, and large-scale mechanized drives on Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities.

Key Takeaways February 19

- Russian and Belarusian forces carried out the final day of active tactical exercises as part of the Joint Russian-Belarusian "Union Resolve 2022" exercise, scheduled to end on February 20. Russian forces currently remain scattered across several Belarusian training grounds and will likely require until at least February 20 to concentrate in southern Belarus if Russia intends to leverage them in an attack on Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko oversaw Russia's "GROM" nuclear triad exercises, currently being held earlier in the year than previous annual iterations—likely to deter any significant NATO response to possible Russian aggression against Ukraine.
- Chairman of the Russian State Duma (Parliament) Vyacheslav Volodin announced the Duma will hold a session on February 22 to discuss and respond to what the Kremlin is calling a forced mass exodus of Russian citizens from the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics (LNR and DNR).
- The Russian-backed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics began the general mobilization of military-age male citizens amid increasingly frantic claims (amplified by Kremlin media) of an impending Ukrainian offensive against Donbas, including the publication of a faked Ukrainian offensive plan.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky notably left Ukraine to attend the Munich Security Conference in person, and urged Western states to take imminent action against Russian escalations.
- US and NATO officials emphasized unity and collective defense among member states against Russian escalations at the Munich Security Conference in Germany but announced no new policies.
- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated Russia's security concerns should be respected but urged all states to respect Ukraine's sovereignty, marking a possible break in China's previous full support for Russia in the current Ukraine crisis.

Ukraine Conflict Update 1

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

February 18, 10:00pm EST

Russia will likely attack Ukraine before February 21, 2022, as we discuss [here](#). The Kremlin has deployed sufficient military forces and set informational conditions to conduct offensive operations including limited incursions into unoccupied Ukraine, a comprehensive air and missile campaign, and large-scale mechanized drives on Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities.

ISW's Russia Team is launching a new product line, Ukraine Conflict Updates, in light of this forecast. This daily synthetic product covering key events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine will replace ISW's previous "[Indicators and Thresholds for Russian Military Operations in Ukraine and/or Belarus](#)," which we maintained from November 12, 2021 through February 17, 2022. That document will no longer be updated.

Russia-Ukraine Warning Update: New Indicators of Imminent Russian Attack

[Click here to read the full update.](#)

This update marked the beginning of ISW's crisis coverage on the conflict in Ukraine.

By Fredrick W. Kagan and Mason Clark

February 18, 2022, 2:00 pm EST

Russia may launch an attack on Ukraine on Saturday, February 19, 2022. The attack would likely begin with an air and missile campaign targeting much of Ukraine to decapitate the government and degrade the Ukrainian military as well as the ability of Ukrainian citizens to prepare to resist a subsequent Russian invasion. US and allied governments have been warning of such an attack for some days, pointing to the size of the Russian forces concentrated on Ukraine's borders.[1] Western officials have additionally said that Russian troops have moved to jumping-off positions for an invasion over the past 24 hours.